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THE OUTCAST WARRIOR



“There big boat.”

THE OUTCAST WARRIOR

A Tale of the Red Frontier

BY

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Author of

"For the Mikado," "The Blue Dragon," "Rick Dale,"
"At War with Pontiac," "The Mates Series,"
"The Flamingo Feather," etc., etc.



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THE OUTCAST WARRIOR

A TALE OF THE RED FRONTIER

CHAPTER I

THE DISAPPEARANCE

BOTH Arnold Knighton and Everett Wester were products of New England, but the former was a son of poverty, having been born and brought up on a small farm, the sole worldly possession of his father, while Wester was the only child of a wealthy manufacturer. One had worked hard, early and late, ever since he could remember, and had dearly earned every success of his life; to the other everything had come without effort. Arnold, from the first, had studied with a dogged determination to win power through knowledge. As he had earned other things, so he earned an education, as any boy can who has the moral courage to do, and to do cheerfully, whatever comes to his hand. At length the country lad reached Cambridge, nearly penniless, shy, without friends, clad in a suit that, shabby and ill-fitting, still was his best, but so well equipped men-

tally that he passed every entrance examination for Harvard easily and with a high rating.

It was here that he first met Everett Wester, who had been laboriously dragged thus far up the hill of knowledge by a host of most expensive tutors. His only reason for wanting to go through college was that among his set of fellows it was the proper thing to do. But there are certain desirable things in life that even the wealthiest of young men cannot acquire without personal effort, and one of them is the ability to pass entrance examinations. As Everett had not seen fit to exert this necessary effort, his failure to pass was as complete as it well could be. In fact, while Arnold Knighton's name headed the list of successful candidates, Everett Wester's was at the very foot of the failures.

For the first time in his life the millionaire's son had failed to obtain something he wanted, and also for the first time his ambition was aroused. Promptly cutting loose from the expensive tutors whose best efforts had not succeeded in persuading him of the necessity for study, and upon whom he now laid all the blame of his humiliation, he sought out the shabby youth at whose coat he had sneered and promptly began to talk business.

"Your name is Knighton?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes," replied Arnold, regarding his faultlessly attired, easy-mannered visitor with curiosity, not unmixed with envy.

“And you have just passed the entrance exams with flying colors?”

“I believe I have passed them.”

“Well, I haven’t; but what I have done is to break the record of failures. Now, I take it from your general appearance that you don’t have money to burn, nor any too much to spend even on necessities.”

“No,” admitted Arnold, flushing vividly. “I have only what I can earn, and thus far that has been very little.”

“Good!” exclaimed the other. “That is just what I hoped; for, if you were well fixed you wouldn’t listen to the proposition I am about to make, and which I trust you will accept. I suppose you expect to work your way through college?”

“Yes; that is the only way I can hope to get through.”

“Then I want to engage your services, at your own price, for the next four years—that is, if you can, and will, fit me to pass the September exams, and so enter college with the class to which you will belong.”

Again Arnold’s features were flushed, but this time with the joy-light of hope, as he answered:

“Do you really mean that you want me to tutor you and are willing to pay for it?”

“Of course I do,” laughed Everett, “and a precious stiff job you’ll find you’ve undertaken, too. I’ve already had the best coaches known to the trade, and in my

recent failure you behold the result of their utmost efforts. But if you are willing to engage with the forlorn hope, just name your price and come along down to Bar Harbor, where my people are to spend the summer."

"I don't know what price to name," replied Arnold; "nor do I think I care to go with you to Bar Harbor."

"Why not?"

"Because I am not accustomed to Bar Harbor society. I have not the proper clothing to wear, nor the means to keep up such an appearance as would be expected. Also, from what I have heard, I believe Bar Harbor to be one of the very worst places in which to attempt summer studying. Another reason why I can't go is that I have promised to help my father with his farm this summer."

"Then you can't tutor me?"

"Yes, I can, if you will spend the summer at my home."

"Do you think you could fit me to pass the fall exams?"

"I know I can, if you will study."

"How about terms?"

"If you will pay my mother ten dollars per week; that will cover all your expenses, including tutoring."

"Such a price is ridiculous! Why, my father has been paying tutors as high as ten dollars per day."

"It is all I can take, unless you pass the fall exam-

inations. If you do, and your father chooses to double the sum named, I will accept the extra money."

"How about helping me through college after I get in?"

"When you have got in will be time enough to discuss that question."

So it was settled; and though Everett was reluctant to relinquish the summer pleasures of Bar Harbor, he was sufficiently anxious to enter college to make the sacrifice and go to the poor little inland farm with the tutor upon whom he had pinned his faith.

Nor did Arnold have an entirely pleasant summer. Never in his life had he worked so hard nor under such discouraging conditions. Nevertheless, he succeeded to such an extent that in September Everett Wester successfully passed the entrance examinations and became a duly accredited member of the class to which he had aspired. To be sure, he got in only "by the skin of his teeth," as he himself expressed it, but that he actually had entered college gave cause for such gratitude to the tutor through whom the great feat had been accomplished that Mr. Wester attempted to present Arnold with a check for one thousand dollars. But the latter proudly refused it, declaring that, having named his price, he could take nothing more. Then Mr. Wester made him a wonderful offer that should cover the next four years, and Arnold gratefully accepted it. By its terms he was to room with Everett and have all his

college expenses paid. In addition he was to receive one thousand dollars a year until graduation, provided he continued to aid his roommate in his studies to such purpose that the latter also should graduate at the end of four years. If that happy event took place, Arnold was to receive an extra bonus of one thousand dollars on the day that Everett was handed his diploma.

Thus it happened that studious, hard-working Arnold Knighton dragged easy-going, pleasure-loving Everett Wester through college. Though the relative positions with which they had started, at the head and foot of their class, were maintained to the end, Everett received his diploma, and thereafter was entitled to all the respectful consideration due a university man.

With this end accomplished, he seemed to have realized the sole ambition of his life, and thereafter he devoted his time to the pursuit of idle pleasure. He soon became known as the leader of a fast set of wealthy young fellows, and began to show traces of the heavy dissipation into which he had plunged. Nominally he had entered his father's business, but in reality he was as strange to its offices as was the most casual visitor. Having cast off the restraining influence of his college roommate immediately upon graduation. Everett so shunned Arnold's company that in two years the young men did not meet half a dozen times. During this period Knighton studied medicine and took up chemistry as a recreation. Occasionally he dined with the

Westers, and at one of these dinners he met Mollie Kenton, a girl from Kentucky, with whom he fell desperately in love before discovering that she was already engaged to marry his former roommate.

After that he carefully avoided meeting her, and when Everett informed him that he had selected him to be best man at the wedding, Arnold declined the unwelcome honor so curtly that the other regarded him with grieved amazement. In the end, as Arnold could advance no satisfactory reason for his refusal without revealing the true state of his feelings, he reluctantly acceded to Everett's request. Then ensued the most unhappy month of his life, and, as the dreaded day drew near, his mental distress began to affect his health.

In the meantime Everett, having discovered that his friend's knowledge of medical chemistry enabled him to compound the most marvelous sedatives and tonics for counteracting the effects of the dissipations into which he was plunging more heavily than ever, with the promise of "swearing off" on his wedding day, had become a frequent visitor to Arnold's rooms. Nominally he was there to discuss details of the approaching event, but always he begged for a nerve-steadying pill or powder.

The wedding was to take place in Boston at the house of Miss Kenton's aunt, and the bride's parents arrived from the West only on the previous day. The ceremony was to be performed very early in the morning, as the young couple were to leave for a European

trip on a steamer that sailed an hour before noon. On the night before the great event Everett Wester spread for his bachelor friends a feast of such sumptuous extravagance as to form a nine days' topic for conversation in club and drawing-room. To it Arnold Knighton had, of course, been bidden, but at the last moment he sent a note of regret at being unable to attend on account of an indisposition. Then he shut himself in his rooms with only his own unhappy thoughts for company.

Never had he felt so lonely, so wretched, so devoid of ambition or hope for the future. Both his parents having died while he was in college, he was left without a near relative in the world. Now, the one person to whom he could joyfully devote his life was to pass forever beyond his reach, while he had promised to stand calmly by and see her given to another. Could he do it? Would his strength hold out against the terrible strain? So doubtful was he that he even contemplated flight rather than undergo the ordeal, and had that very day withdrawn from its depository his slender stock of money. Then he had dismissed the idea of running away as too cowardly for consideration. Now, however, in the loneliness of the night it constantly recurred to him, and through long hours he fought it as one fights for life itself.

It was nearly morning before he conquered his temptation and flung himself on a lounge for an hour

or two of sleep. From a troubled dream he was aroused by the rattle of a cab that seemed to stop beneath his windows. Then unsteady footsteps sounded on the stair and approached his doorway. In another minute Everett Wester, breaking from the grasp of a "cabby" who had assisted him thus far, plunged headlong into the room, babbling with drunken incoherence.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the cabby, touching his hat to Arnold, "but this was the only address he give me, and I thought it was his own place."

"It's all right," replied Arnold, commanding himself to calmness by a mighty effort. "This is where he belongs, and you may go."

"But he ain't paid his fare, sir."

With this Everett, who had succeeded in gaining a sitting posture on the bed, flung a well-filled pocketbook at the cabby's feet and thickly bade him go away.

Arnold picked up the wallet and, after paying the cabman, handed it back to its owner, who promptly flung it out of an open window. Then he burst into a fit of maudlin weeping, accompanied by bitter denunciations of his friends.

To quiet him Arnold persuaded the drunken man to swallow a powerful sedative, and a moment later had the satisfaction of seeing him fall back on the bed in a heavy sleep. Then for an hour he sat gazing at the flushed, drink-sodden face and listening to the stertorous breathing.

This was the man to whom the one woman in all the world was to be given for life within a few hours! Could he stand by and witness the sacrifice? No, he could not, nor would he make the attempt.

With this decision reached, Arnold rose, hastily packed a traveling-bag, and scribbled a note to the effect that he had gone out and would not return until late that evening. This he pinned outside his door, which he locked, putting the key in his own pocket. Then he left the building just as the first gray of day was manifest in the eastern sky.

A few hours later a would-be bride and a group of expectant wedding guests wondered, with ever-growing anxiety, at the absence of the prospective bridegroom. He was not at his home, nor had he been there since the day before. Also the one who was to have stood with him as best man had failed to appear. A messenger sent to the rooms of the latter brought back a note in Arnold Knighton's well-known handwriting, and dated that very day, that had been found pinned to his door.

The hour set for the wedding was long past, the steamer on which the bridal couple were to have journeyed had sailed without them, the whispering guests were dispersed, and the bride-elect, mortified beyond words, having laid aside her festal robes, was sitting by a window listening dumbly to the entreaties of her parents that she should at once accompany them to their

western home. Of a sudden her attention was attracted to a figure in a passing cab. It was that of a man, hatless and in disheveled evening dress, who lifted a haggard face as he was hurried by. For an instant their eyes met; then he was gone.

“Very well, mother, I will go with you,” said the girl, turning from the window, and the next train for the West bore her away, never to return.

CHAPTER II

A COUNCIL ON THE "TEXAS" DECK

A SMALL, stern-wheeled steamer labored heavily against the turbid current of the upper Missouri while three men earnestly conversed in the pilot-house on her "Texas" deck. This boat was a very different affair from the great, gaudily frescoed passenger and mail craft of the Mississippi, one of which could carry a warehouse full of freight at a load and make her two hundred miles a day upstream against the stiff current. So far different was she that she had no passenger accommodations to speak of, was intrusted with no mails, and carried no freight, that is, not on consignment, though she was laden with a rather valuable cargo, all in barrels and cases. Her captain, who also was her owner, called himself a "fur trader," and so he was, only he was a low-down, sneaking sort of a trader, who avoided the Government posts and agencies about which most of the Indian trade of the great Northwest centered, and only visited outlying camps of both white men and Indians, wood-yards, and other secluded places where no official eye might note his transactions. He was a whisky trader, and dealt in the one commodity that the Government ordered should not be sold to its red-skinned wards.

The law was all right, but in those days of the late fifties, just before the Civil War, it was almost a dead letter on the upper Missouri, and both white men and red men did pretty much as they pleased. Besides, who cared to attempt the enforcing of a law for the benefit of Indians, when three-fourths of the people of the United States regarded them as noxious pests, fit only to be exterminated as quickly as possible? So the little old *Aztec* paddled up the great river from St. Louis with the opening of each spring, laden with liquid death, and every autumn she slipped merrily down with the swift current, bearing a rich cargo of furs, for which she had exchanged only the cheapest and deadliest of poisons.

While thus making easy money at his scoundrel trade, Captain Bat Cranshaw was not averse to increasing his gains by taking on a passenger now and then at remunerative rates, though, as he had no license for carrying passengers, such travelers were always obliged to appear as belonging to his crew. Of course, Indians didn't count, for in the eyes of the white man's law their lives were worthless. So, whenever any of them expressed a wish to travel on the *Aztec* for greater or less distances, Captain Bat always accommodated them, charging exorbitant rates, to be sure, but obligingly "taking it out in trade."

On this present trip the whisky boat was honored with but one white passenger, who was rated as ship's

surgeon, and addressed only as "Doc." He was a young fellow of pleasing appearance, tall, large-framed, smooth-faced, but looking little more than a boy, and absolutely uncommunicative regarding himself or his own affairs. He had come on board at St. Louis an hour before the steamer sailed, seeking the cheapest, speediest, and least conspicuous way of traveling to the very headwaters of the Missouri, and had expressed himself as quite willing to put up with such inferior accommodations as the *Aztec* offered.

The only other passenger on this trip was a young Aricaree Indian named Peninah, son of Chief Two Stars, who, in company with some traders, had gone down to St. Louis late in the previous autumn to acquire a knowledge of the white man's language and mode of living that should fit him for the honorable position of tribal interpreter. Now he was on his way home, and there never was a schoolboy homeward bound after his first long absence more joyful at the sight of familiar objects or more impatient to reach his journey's end than was this young savage at the first faint glimpses of certain distant buttes that marked the land of his people.

Wildly excited, he dashed into the stuffy little cabin where lay his fellow-passenger, fever-stricken and restlessly tossing in a dirty bunk, to tell him the great news:

"Me see 'Ricaree land!" he cried. "Now two more

sun and me find um my fadder, my modder, my brudder, my sister, my peop!"

Although their acquaintance was short, these two, thrown constantly together since leaving St. Louis, already were upon the verge of a friendship. The doctor was deeply impressed with the strength of character, honesty, and outspoken manliness of this the first Indian whom he ever had known, while the liking of the other for him was based upon gratitude. A few minutes before their steamer had left St. Louis the young Indian, running across the levee, and in danger of missing connection, had collided with a negro roustabout wheeling a truck and been knocked to the cobbles, where for a minute he lay stunned and bleeding from an ugly cut on the head. Most of the spectators, white as well as black, only laughed to see an "Injun" in such a plight; but one, who had witnessed the incident from the deck of the *Aztec*, sprang ashore, picked up the unfortunate lad, and bore him to the boat, where he cared for him with skilled tenderness. But for him the other would have been left behind, and but for his kindly care the wound might have proved serious. As it was, the young Aricaree recovered so rapidly that within three days he was nearly as well as ever, and exceedingly grateful to his new acquaintance.

At first they talked much together, always of Peninah's land and people; but after a few days the white man grew moody and silent, his eyes shone with a

feverish light, and he lost interest in his surroundings. Then he took to his bunk, and despite the remedies that he prescribed for and administered to himself, he steadily grew worse, until it was evident that he was a very sick man in the grasp of a virulent fever. And that is what Captain Bat Cranshaw, his pilot, and the *Aztec's* mate were discussing on the "Texas" deck with the opening of this chapter.

"Tell yer," said the captain decisively, "the Doc's got smallpox, an' 'tain't nothing else. I know the signs. Seen enough of 'em, and orter. There's a-plenty of it in St. Louy, too."

"But he hadn't been in town no time at all," objected the mate. "Landed from the *Magnolia* day before we pulled out, and come on board fust thing in the morning. Besides, if it's what you say, it orter have showed up 'fore now."

"Not of needcessity," observed the pilot. "I've knowed a man to be two weeks from the place where he ketched smallpox befur ever it give a sign on him. Then it broke out wust kind, and killed him, too. I 'gree with Cap'n Bat that we oughter git shet of him 'fore it reaches ketching pint, else all of us'll be gone coons in no time. I say put him ashore, bag, baggage, and bedding, at the fust Injun village we come to. We're due to strike a 'Ricaree camp long 'bout to-morrer evening."

"That won't do," objected the captain. "In the

fust place the 'Rees wouldn't have him, seeing as how they've been mighty nigh wiped out by smallpox already, and are more skeered of it than they be of the hull Sioux nation. Also, it would hurt our trade to have a lot of 'em killed off. Besides, if we're going to git shet of him, the quicker we do it the better. What's the next wood-yard, Sam?"

"Big Cotton, t'other side the 'Ricaree town," answered the pilot. "No, 'tain't, nuther," he added. "I remember now that Slim Isaacs told me just as we was starting that the Durfee people were making one at the mouth of Fat Cow Creek, and there's the pint now. We'll be to it inside of an hour."

"Inside of an hour" night had set in; but working slowly along the bank and avoiding trouble as though by instinct, the *Aztec* finally gained the new wood-yard landing in safety, and was made fast to a big cottonwood tree growing at the water's edge. She showed no lights, nor was there any of the noisy turmoil that usually attends the landing of a river steamer. Of course, there were many unavoidable sounds, but they were subdued as much as possible, and even the mate, who on such occasions was wont to direct his sable "rousters" with volleys of loud-voiced profanity, now only swore in hoarse whispers. At length the gang-plank was launched, and immediately the sturdy negroes bore over it a burden which they deposited on the ground the moment they reached shore, and from which

they retreated with all speed. A number of articles were flung or carried to the bank even while the gang-plank was being hoisted on board, and, without having stopped more than two minutes in all, the *Aztec* again was under way and swinging out into the muddy stream.

Short as was the stop, it allowed time for a sharp controversy between Captain Bat and his Indian passenger.

“What thing you do with Doc?” demanded the latter as he realized that his friend was being carried ashore.

“Oh, that’s all right,” replied the captain carelessly. “He’s too sick to travel, and he asked to be set ashore where he can be taken care of.”

“But in this place are no mans. He will maybe make die.”

“Not on yer life! the choppers’ll take care of that. He’s got plunder enough to pay ’em well.”

“No, no! If him go, then must I go, too. Him good man to me, now me go with him.”

Thus saying, the Indian lad started up the gang-plank, but the captain, seizing him by an arm, jerked him violently back, exclaiming:

“Stay where you are, you young fool! ’Tain’t none of your business noways; but I don’t mind telling you the man’s got smallpox, and ’twould be as much as your life’s worth to tech him. Not that your life’s worth more’n that of any other red nigger, but I’ve got to

deliver you safe and sound at the 'Ree camp to get my passage money. So stand back, and keep back, afore I'm 'bleeged to knock yer down and tie yer."

"All right, Cap. Me no like um smallpox," answered the lad, so meekly as instantly to disarm suspicion. In another moment he was running noiselessly and unmolested toward the after end of the boat, from which, as she began to draw away from the bank, he quietly slipped into the black water and was swept astern by the swift current.

His desertion was not discovered until daylight of the following morning, when it threw Captain Bat Cranshaw into a towering rage. "The infernal coyote!" he cried. "I'll get even with him yet, see if I don't. The idea of a measly, low-down Injun playing such a trick on me! Now what'll I do?"

The position was a trying one. Peninah was expected on the *Aztec* whenever that boat of ill-repute should appear, and Chief Two Stars would be anxiously awaiting his son's coming. If she should stop at the village and her captain should state that the lad had not traveled up the river with him, not only would he fail to collect the money owing for Peninah's passage, but the lie would certainly be detected sooner or later. If he told the truth, then would it be generally known that he had put a white man ashore to die, and that act of inhumanity would involve him in no end of trouble. Peninah had left behind him a fine rifle and

a number of other things that he had purchased in St. Louis. Also among his belongings was found a rifle recognized as the doctor's which the lad had been cleaning the day before. As these effects would much more than pay for the young Indian's passage it would be a great pity to give them up. So Captain Bat finally decided to slip past the Aricaree village under cover of darkness without stopping to make report of any kind or even to trade.

Thus it happened that for many days Chief Two Stars watched anxiously for the beloved son who came not, while a hundred miles away that same son, bravely fighting against disease and starvation, waited, with heavy heart, for the aid that he so confidently expected his father to send him as soon as he learned from the *Aztec* why his boy had not returned home on the trading steamer.

CHAPTER III

AT "FAT COW" WOOD-YARD

As the wood-yard at which the *Aztec's* passengers had been left had been located in Sioux territory without permission from the red lords of that region, they had raided it soon after its establishment, killed, captured, or driven away its occupants, set its single stockaded building on fire, and departed, well satisfied with their exploit. Thus all Captain Bat's efforts to make a landing without discovery went for nothing, since there was no one on hand to discover him. He had told the sick man that he was going to land him at an army post where there was a surgeon and a hospital in which he could be cared for properly, thus gaining the latter's ready agreement to the plan.

Weakened by fever, and in the excitement of landing, the sick man paid no attention to his surroundings until he had been left alone for some minutes. Then he wondered at the absolute silence about him and why someone did not come to his aid. He tried to raise himself in order to look about, but could not. He could only lie, with wide-open eyes, staring into the night and listening with strained ears for some reassuring sound. He heard the ever-receding cough of the *Aztec's* high-

pressure exhaust as she pursued her way upstream, and the lapping waves of the river as it swirled and eddied against the bank. From far away he heard the weird barking and long-drawn howl of a coyote, but of sounds indicating human proximity there was none.

A wave of terror flooded over him, and he strove to shout for the assistance that he still believed must be near at hand, but his utmost efforts produced sounds only little louder than a whisper. All at once the ominous word "smallpox" recurred to him, and he remembered having heard it muttered by one of those who had borne him ashore. Now all was clear. It was believed on the steamer that he had fallen beneath the dreaded scourge, and her people had left him in this place to die alone and uncared for. In his despair he raved against the fate thus allotted him, and denounced with bitter words the cowards of his own race who had consigned him to it. Thus exhausting his little strength he finally lay silent in a sort of stupor, from which he was roused by a light footfall close at hand. Then came a low-voiced call that at first he would not answer; but at its repetition he essayed a faint "hello." In another moment a human figure, dripping wet, knelt beside him.

"Who is it, and what do you want?" he whispered as a gentle hand passed over his face.

"Peninah," was the answer. "An' me very 'fraid me no find um white man."

"Peninah? And did they leave you, too? But why? You are not ill."

"No. Me plenty well. You fix um good."

"Then why did they leave you behind?"

"No leave. Cap'n say no stop. Try take um up river. Me jump in water. Swim plenty. Come for find friend. Now find um. Stay. Fix um good."

"But, Peninah, didn't they tell you I had small-pox?"

"Yaas. Tell um plenty. Me no care. Big Medicine my good friend. One time me sick, he fix um. Bimeby him sick. Me try fix him allesame. Now me go littly way. Maybe find um lodge. Maybe find um white man. Bring um."

With this the lad was gone, while the sick man lay motionless, half-dozing, half-conscious of a renewed hope inspired by the coming of the single-hearted young Indian.

When Peninah returned, the other asked:

"Did you find the fort? Is the surgeon coming?"

"No. No fort. No medicine man. This what you call chop-chop place. Tree chop—fire canoe burn um. Now man all gone. No fire. No eat. No notting. White man lodge, me found um. Injun been, make burn um. Now we go. Maybe you walk littly, eh?"

With this the lad lifted the sick man to his feet, and with a supreme effort the latter tottered a few steps, but the exertion was too great. His head swam,

his eyes closed, and, overcome by weakness, he sank unconscious in his companion's arms.

When next the patient realized that he still was in the world of men he found himself lying in a rude bunk, apparently in a house, and with eyes fixed upon a figure that knelt beside a fire. Also there was a pleasant smell of cooking in the air, and he knew that he was hungry. He made a slight sound, and the figure, springing to his bedside, bent eagerly over him.

It was Peninah, and his face, worn thin by weary vigils and overwork, glowed with joy. His friend had come back to him from the world of spirits, and now perhaps he would live. He surely would if only he could partake of food. Anxiously the lad held to his patient's lips a queer sort of a cup made from the tip of a buffalo horn, scraped thin, and filled with broth. The sick man took a sip, a swallow, and then another. Nor did he stop until he had drained the little cup of its contents, perhaps a gill in all. Then his eyes begged for more; but Peninah, proudly happy and willing to give him anything on earth, sternly shook his head.

"No. No more eat," he said. "Now time for sleep plenty. Bimeby eat, plenty. Git strong quick. Good. Eh?"

Recognizing the voice of authority that might not be resisted, the patient submitted, closed his eyes and slept, while with beaming face the other watched him.

During ten days had he fought, single-handed, against fearful odds for this result. The house in which they were was the wood-choppers' shack, stripped of everything and partially burned by the Sioux raiders. To it, in that first night of their desertion, he had brought the sick man on his back. In one of his friend's pockets he had found a box of matches, and so was able to make a fire, but not a scrap of food remained in the shack, and for twenty-four hours he had nothing to eat. Then he killed a snake, which, roasted on a bed of coals, proved most palatable, and a little later he trapped a prairie dog. The very next day brought his greatest good fortune—a drowned buffalo came floating down the river, and by almost superhuman exertion he got the carcass to land. His unconscious friend furnished a hunting-knife, and for the following week Peninah toiled over his prize. He skinned and butchered it, and by the end of the first day had all the meat removed to the safety of the shack. Thereafter he devoted his time to cutting it into thin strips which he smoked on a scaffolding erected over a slow fire, and to dressing the hide. While the latter still was green he stretched it tightly over a round, bowl-shaped frame of split willow poles and interwoven twigs, to which he fastened it with cords of twisted sinew. Thus did he make one of the famous bull-boats of the plains Indians, similar in shape and construction to the skin coracles of the ancient Britons. It was a very ticklish craft, to

be sure, and a very small one, but it was large enough to bear up a single person, and thus was amply big for the purpose Peninah had in view.

The abandoned wood-yard where they had been left was on the eastern side of the river, while the land of the Aricarees bordered the river on the west, and Two Stars' village lay a hundred miles or so farther upstream. As much of this distance was occupied by a great bend of the river, Peninah's plan was to ferry his friend, together with his belongings, to the opposite side and there leave him, while he himself made a bee-line across country on foot for the assistance that he certainly could secure from his own people.

Always dreading a return of the Sioux marauders, the young Aricaree not only was ceaselessly watchful, but most anxious to depart at the earliest possible moment. Thus, with the breaking of his patient's fever, which proved not to be smallpox after all, and at the first sign of his restoration to strength, Peninah one day picked him up and easily bore him to the river's edge, where he gently placed him in the little bull-boat tethered to a tree. The cockleshell also was able to sustain a portion of the doctor's baggage, and when it thus was laden, Peninah swam the river, towing it behind him. Of course, the current swept them far downstream before they reached the opposite side, but this was a minor evil to be overcome by wading and towing the ungainly little craft up, along shore, until a point

was gained considerably higher than that from which they had started.

Here was a narrow, but deep, water-worn crevasse in the bank partially concealed from the river by a growth of bushes, and in this place Peninah left his passenger while he returned to the other side for the remainder of the baggage and their precious store of jerked meat. After these things had been brought over, the rest of the day was spent in stripping the bull-boat of its skin, which was dried and softened to serve as a bed for the white man, in collecting driftwood for a fire, and in preparing a supply of broth for the convalescent. That night the young Aricaree bade his friend farewell, and, promising to return again on the third day, set forth on his search for the village of his own people. He took nothing with him save a strip of jerked meat, even the sole weapon owned between them, the precious hunting-knife, being left with the invalid.

The white man thus, for the first time in his life, left alone in a wilderness peopled only by wild beasts and wilder men, spent the succeeding day in closest hiding, devoting such time as could not be passed in sleeping or eating to an overhauling of his personal effects. Knowing nothing of the conditions he was to encounter, he had brought with him an outfit of most unusual and miscellaneous character. Medicines, for instance, in quantity, surgical instruments, and certain appliances

rarely seen outside a chemical laboratory. While looking over these things, a sealed bottle containing a white powder came under his observation.

“How very useful strychnine will prove out here,” he remarked scornfully. “Good thing to commit suicide with, of course, but I can’t imagine any other use for it. Might as well weed it out and leave it behind, along with a lot of other trash.” Thus thinking, he put the bottle to one side.

He had heard the howling of wolves the night before, and on the second night it was renewed at an early hour. Also, it sounded very close at hand, and rose in such volume as to indicate the presence of numbers of the savage brutes. The lonely man was cooking, or rather scorching, some of his jerked beef in an effort to render it more palatable, and the odor of burning meat, diffused far and wide, had proved a most potent attraction to the gaunt freebooters who howled about his little camp.

Every now and then he caught glimpses of them leaping athwart the gleams of firelight that streamed from the crevasse. Finally one, bolder than the rest, made a snatch at the bundle of meat lying within reach of the man’s hand. The boldness of this assault filled him with horror. Until that moment he had not realized his own danger. Now it was only too evident. He was helpless and almost defenseless. Was he, though? Perhaps not so defenseless as he appeared. If they wanted

meat badly enough to steal it, they should have it, and he would spice it for them into the bargain.

Two days later, as a band of Aricaree horsemen, guided by Peninah, approached the river at this point, they were rendered somewhat anxious by a cloud of buzzards that sailed and circled above the very place for which they were headed. A little later they found, on a narrow beach at the foot of the bluffs, the remains of a dozen great, gaunt buffalo wolves, but on no one of them was there mark of arrow, bullet, spear, or knife.

"No, I simply gave them a dose of poison," explained Peninah's friend.

"Him make big medicine and kill them plenty," translated the lad.

"Wagh! Him big medicine man! Him heap wolf-killer!" exclaimed the wondering Aricarees, and thus was the stranger named "Wicasta," the Wolf-Killer, a name destined in the near future to become famous over a vast region and to many tribes.

CHAPTER IV

WITH THE ARICAREES

SOMETHING more than two years had passed since the Wolf-Killer gained his name, and the decline of a day in early summer found him sitting just outside a lodge, larger and cleaner than any of its neighbors, gazing thoughtfully over a scene that possessed many elements of attraction. The Aricaree village, to which he had been warmly welcomed on account of his friendship with the son of its greatest chieftain, contained a population of about twenty-five hundred souls, and consequently was made up of a great number of lodges, located with some regard to regularity near the mouth of a stream flowing into the Missouri. In the heart of the village was a space reserved for the great Council Lodge, a structure of stout posts formed of whole tree-trunks, poles, osier walls hung with skins, and an earthen roof having a central orifice for the escape of smoke. The square in which stood this greatest lodge was inclosed by a stockade, slight in structure, but affording ample protection against an enemy armed only with bows and arrows.

The bench, or river-bottom, on which the village was planted sloped back, with a gentle rise, for about a mile

to the foot of steep bluffs, and afforded capital pastureland for the great herd of horses forming the principal wealth of the Aricarees. These were at all times watched by mounted guards; while on the crest of the bluffs beyond were stationed warrior outposts, day and night, always keenly alert for signs of danger, and frequently relieved.

From these outposts, who, though distant, were sharply outlined against the sky and plainly visible to the village, came a never-ending succession of signals made by means of fires, smoke, the waving of blankets, the flashing of mirrors, or by the riding of ponies to and fro. By these means was the most important news from the vast prairies, sweeping away to the westward, transmitted as though by telegraph. Thus was announced the coming of friends or the approach of a foe, the home-returning of a war-party, and whether it had won a victory or suffered defeat; the movements of the buffalo herds or of other game; a gathering tempest, a distant smoke on the Missouri marking the infrequent advent of a steamer; the passing batteau of a fur trader, or any of the thousand and one happenings that filled with absorbing interest the everyday life of the American Indian before he was forced into the deadly monotony and utter hopelessness of existence on government reservations.

These bits of information, caught by sharp-eyed observers always watching from the council house roof,

were heralded among the lodges by certain old men who filled the place of town-criers. Also, these reported the decisions from the Council Lodge, in which were regulated all the more important affairs of the tribe.

On that pleasant summer's evening, with the sun near his setting, a perfect peace reigned over the village. Its children romped with shrill laughter at the river's edge, where they splashed and swam in the yellow waters with the joy of so many newly hatched ducklings. Women were making preparations for the evening meal or coming in groups, merry with chatter and laughter, from the garden patches which they cultivated with hoes formed from the shoulder blades of elks and where they raised corn, beans, and pumpkins. The lordly warriors, whose life work was war and the chase, spent this hour of leisure in smoking, gambling, the playing of athletic games, the discussion of current affairs, or in respectful listening to tales of prowess rehearsed by their elders.

Aloof from this busy life, but watching its various scenes with curious interest, sat the white man known as "Wicasta," who, having accepted formal adoption into the tribe, was now regarded as one of the permanent residents of that hospitable village. He was clad in buckskin, and his hair, uncut since leaving civilization, hung long over his shoulders. His face was smooth-shaven, but tanned by sun and wind until it was but little lighter than those of his Indian compan-

ions; and it was evident at a glance that his present mode of life had endowed him with a muscular strength undreamed of in earlier years. By means of it he had established a supremacy in athletic games that now was rarely disputed. Also had he learned the tricks of the hunter, until he ranked among the foremost; while the bravery with which he had fought in defense of the village during the several attacks made upon it since he became a resident had earned for him the privileges of a warrior. Through his knowledge of medicine and surgery he had been able to accomplish many cures that seemed to the Aricarees little short of miracles and which caused him to rank first among the medicine men of the village. Of course, the other medicine men hated him and strove in every way to check his ever-increasing influence, but thus far their efforts had been made in vain. The sick or wounded no longer appealed to them for aid, but to him, and through the presents of horses, furs, and other articles of value received from grateful patients he was accumulating wealth beyond that of any member of the tribe. With two classes of patients he steadfastly refused to have dealings: those who came to grief while under the influence of liquor and those wounded while on scalp-hunting expeditions. These, comprising the most lawless elements of the tribe, naturally sided with his enemies, the medicine men, and formed a party of opposition to him; but secure in his own strength, and knowing that he could always count

upon the firm support of Chief Two Stars, Wicasta paid slight heed to them. He was happy in his work, in his friends, and in his home, for, by the merest accident, a home was one of the first things that had been acquired by this white dweller among savages.

He had been with the Aricarees but a few weeks when, being fully recovered of his illness, he accompanied Peninah and a small party of buffalo-hunters into the Sioux country to secure a supply of meat for the village. As at that time Wicasta had no rifle and was unskilled in the use of a bow, he joined the party only as a pupil in the art of buffalo hunting, without any idea of taking an active part in the sport. But when, after several days of disappointment, the game was finally discovered, stalked with the utmost caution from leeward until within striking distance, and then charged with a furious rush of men and horses, he found himself taking part in the mad race with all the ardor of the Indians themselves. Although he did not at the moment realize the fact, he could not have remained behind, had he chosen so to do, for the horse that he rode was a trained buffalo hunter, and determined to participate in the chase without regard to his rider's wishes. The surprised herd gazed for a moment stupidly, and then started on a gallop that, while appearing heavy and awkward, covered the ground with amazing speed. But the agile hunting ponies were still swifter, and within a couple of minutes had borne their

naked, yelling riders into the thick of the flying mass, where they quickly were lost to sight in the cloud of dust raised by thousands of pounding hoofs.

In the resulting *mêlée* the young white man, who until that day had never even seen a live buffalo, found himself racing furiously beside one of the shaggy brutes, so close as to be within touch, and making fierce lunges at its side with his hunting-knife, the only weapon that he bore. The next thing he knew his quarry had darted off at a right angle and was rushing at headlong pace down a shallow coulee, or dry water course, while he, equally reckless of consequences, followed in hot pursuit. Mile after mile they ran, the man several times getting within striking distance, but at each stab the hunted beast darted forward as though with renewed energy.

Suddenly, while in full career, the knees of the wounded animal gave way, his lowered head struck the earth, and his huge bulk flung a complete somersault. Unable for a moment to check the impetus of his steed, the hunter dashed by the prone body and through a narrow fringe of timber that seemed to have risen by magic before him. On its farther side was a stream, from which both he and his horse, dust-choked and dripping with sweat, drank thirstily. So exhausted were they and so deliciously refreshing was the water that the man spent some fifteen minutes dabbling in it before bethinking himself of the result of his chase. Then he walked

back to where the buffalo had fallen and still lay. It was dead, and must have expired as it fell, for a stream of dark life-blood had gushed from its foam-flecked mouth. Also it was bleeding from the several deep wounds inflicted by his hunting-knife; but the most extraordinary wound of all was a cut extending along the animal's hump, from which a strip of meat had been removed.

As the hunter gazed in astonishment at this sight, for which he could not in any way account, he became aware of an odor of burning, and it flashed across him that other humans must be in that vicinity.

Cautiously making his way in the direction thus indicated, he came upon a strange scene. Seated with his back against the trunk of a cottonwood was an Indian, evidently very old and very feeble. Beside him knelt a young squaw, whose fair complexion denoted an admixture of white blood in her veins, holding out to him a strip of meat that she had lifted from a bed of coals. It was plain that she was urging him to partake of the food thus providentially provided. But he heeded her not nor gave a glance in her direction. His dim eyes stared past her with a fixed gaze, as though fascinated by what they saw, and her words fell on ears already deaf to mortal sounds. To the trained eye of the physician it was evident that the ancient warrior was in the act of passing from the turbulent scenes of his long life and already had caught a glimpse of the great Beyond.

As Wicasta hesitated, not knowing whether to ad-



“You coward!” stormed Wicasta.

vance or withdraw, there came the sudden twang of a bow-string and a feathered dart buried itself deep in the old man's side. At the same moment an Aricaree warrior bounded from an opposite thicket and, even as the head of the veteran sank to his breast, it was scalped, and the murderer, with a shout of triumph, held aloft his horrid trophy. For a minute the kneeling girl remained motionless; then, with a scream of agony, she flung herself upon the lifeless form. Without compunction or hesitation the Aricaree raised his bloody knife, and would have plunged it into her body had not the white spectator of the tragedy leaped forward and with a blow sent him staggering backward.

“You coward!” stormed Wicasta. “You cur! You brutal assassin! Is there any reason under heaven why I should not kill you as you just now killed that helpless old man?”

In another instant the two would have clinched in a battle to the death, but a sound of galloping hoofs caused them to pause; and directly, Peninah, in anxious search of his friend, appeared on the scene. When all explanations were made and the intricacies of the situation had been untangled, it appeared that the dead man was a Sioux warrior, so old as to be long past his years of usefulness, who had become so burdensome to his people as finally to have been left behind them to die or be killed, as might happen. His youngest and favorite granddaughter, Koda, whose father had been a

“mountain man,” or white trapper, heartbroken at this act of selfish cruelty, had slipped from camp when two days’ journey distant and made her way back to him, determined to share his fate. A little parched corn had been left with the old man, but he could not eat it, and he was dying of starvation before the eyes of the devoted girl, when a buffalo pursued by a white man, and left dead behind him while he passed on, offered a food-supply too tempting to be resisted.

So she had taken a portion of this most timely gift, hastily cooked it, and was urging her grandfather to eat when one of the hereditary foes of their people had stumbled across them. Of course, this opportunity for snatching the scalp of a lifelong enemy was too precious to be neglected, and the Aricaree would also have added that of the girl to his collection of trophies had not Wicasta interfered to prevent him.

As it was, the warrior afterward claimed before a council of Aricaree chiefs that this scalp was lawfully his, and they would have so awarded it had not Wicasta for the second time saved the Sioux maiden’s life by demanding that she be given him for a wife, a demand that, according to Indian law, might not be refused. Thus the white medicine man unexpectedly acquired a home, and later became the devoted father of the little Hanana (Morning Light), the merriest, most bewitching, and most precocious girl baby in the village, and the only one having blue eyes.

CHAPTER V

STORY OF THE WHITE BUFFALO

ALTHOUGH on that summer's evening the Aricaree village appeared peaceful and happy, it was filled with a vague uneasiness and with many heartburnings. Never, since the wanton killing of Koda's grandfather, had the Aricarees scored against their hereditary foes, the Dakotah. In all that time no Sioux scalp had been taken, nor had the Aricaree herd been increased by stolen Sioux ponies, although many expeditions had been sent forth in quest of both scalps and horses. Invariably had they returned empty-handed, sometimes with depleted numbers, and the worst of it was that the Aricarees well knew why their enemies were so invariably successful against them. They knew, because in the early days of her captivity, while boasting of the prowess of her own people, Koda had told them.

The Dakotah were in possession of the skin of a white buffalo, and though it was zealously guarded in the great Council Lodge of the Salt Waters (Devil's Lake), its virtue had spread to all of the seven allied peoples forming the Sioux nation, and thus had they become irresistible.

From earliest days the white buffalo, so rare that not more than one among the millions might be known to a generation, has been esteemed the most sacred of animals by the North American Indian. He has taken rank with the white elephant of the East, the white bull of India, the white seal of Arctic dwellers, the white whale of the south seas, and the innumerable other white beasts, birds, or fishes venerated at various times, and in varying degrees, by all the peoples of the world. But on the plains no medicine was equal to the medicine of the white buffalo, and nothing could bring to a tribe such good fortune as the possession of one of the rare white-haired robes. Now the Sioux owned this priceless treasure, and the Aricarees were consumed with envy. Also they were fearful that, unless they could by some means counteract its charm, their enemies would presently wipe them from the face of the earth. But what might be done? This was the problem that had occupied the most eminent talent among all the medicine men of the Aricarees, together with those of their stanch allies the Mandans, for nearly two years, and on the date of this chapter it proved itself to be no nearer a solution than when first propounded.

It easily had been learned from Koda how the Sioux obtained their white buffalo skin. For a long time—many years, according to her story—one of the wisest of their medicine men had forced himself to abstain from all dreams, save such as included, in one shape or

another, a white buffalo. Finally his craft was rewarded by a dream so vivid that it might not be misconstrued. In it had appeared the desired object surrounded by clouds of smoke or steam, clearly indicating that its abiding place was the far-away land of Great Smoke that every plains Indian knew of, but which few of them had visited. Thus guided, a party of young Sioux braves had set forth, and after an absence of many moons half of their number had returned, bringing with them the coveted prize. Those left behind had yielded up their lives to the evil spirits of the Great Smoke Land; but, as their scalps had not been taken, this in nowise detracted from the magic properties of the skin brought home by the survivors.

This tale, told by the wife of Wicasta, so fired the ambition of the Aricarees that party after party of young warriors departed in search of the Great Smoke Land and its priceless treasures; but, one after another, they had returned unsuccessful and with thinned ranks. Some had met with enemies and been defeated in battle; others had had their horses stolen, and still others, losing their way amid the ranges of mighty mountains guarding the region of their desire, had met disaster in various forms. Now but one of these expeditions sent forth in quest of the "golden fleece" of the American plains remained to be heard from, and it was one under leadership of Peninah, that had departed to the westward some two months earlier.

Of a sudden the peace of the evening was broken by shrill cries, while many pointing fingers directed attention to the bluffs on whose crest four horsemen, pacing with deliberate motion, rode the sign of home-returning friends. Instantly the village was thrown into a state of tremendous excitement, for those who came might be Peninah's party, and they might be bringing with them that which would retrieve the unhappy fortunes of the tribe. So the younger warriors sprang on their ponies and dashed away to extend vociferous welcome to the returning heroes, while the more important chiefs gathered with Two Stars on the roof of the council house, from which they could command a long extent of trail. The women betook themselves to the preparation of a feast that should chiefly consist of boiled dog-meat, the daintiest food known to their primitive housekeeping; while screaming youngsters chased the unfortunate curs destined for the pot, got in everybody's way, and rendered themselves as undesirably conspicuous as possible.

The home-comers did indeed prove to be Peninah's Argonauts; but they came with empty hands and with faces blackened in token of disaster. Also some who had gone forth with them, now were missing from their ranks. So they filed silently into the village, which received them in silence, and each warrior went to his own lodge, where his squaw, uttering no word, relieved him of shield and weapons, turned loose his wearied

stead, and gave her gloomy lord such comfort as she might in shape of food and tobacco. Thus the black faces remained unseen by any, save only those who ministered to them; nor did they utter speech until their leader had smoked with the chiefs in council and made his report. It was very brief, and was a tale of failure similar to those that had preceded it, except only that he had gained the land of Great Smoke and actually had seen a white buffalo. On attempting to approach it, however, he had been seized with a deadly sickness that nearly ended his life and from which he did not wholly recover for days. Others of his party, making even more desperate efforts to obtain the prize, had been fatally stricken, as had still others who strove to rescue them. So he had been baffled by the all-powerful spirits of evil, and had come home with blackened face to bring his sorrowful tale of defeat.

Not until the great pipe of council had passed three times around the circle of chiefs, and they had meditated in silence upon the story, was it delivered to the old men to be proclaimed throughout the village. Then the seal of silence was broken, and the wailing of women lamenting for those who never more would return to their empty lodges broke forth without restraint. Through all the hours of darkness was it continued, and, mingling with the distressful howlings of wolves and of wolf-like dogs, it effectually banished sleep except from the eyes of children, and rendered the night

hideous. While it continued, three separate councils for considering the critical situation of the tribe held session. One was a council of chiefs and warriors of greatest experience, and another was a mystic gathering of medicine men; but the third was a meeting of but two persons.

This last council, which was the only one that developed a hopeful plan of operations, was held in what was known as the Wolf-Killer's medicine lodge, a small structure of logs standing apart and well to the rear of the village. The white man who had built it thought of it as his laboratory, and few beside himself were suffered to enter it. There was, however, one guest always welcomed to its interior, and his name was Peninah. Even he visited it only at long intervals, and always with greatest secrecy, under cover of darkness.

On this occasion the son of Two Stars, excusing himself from the council of warriors on the plea, invariably allowed, that he wished to retire to a secret place and prepare new medicine, made his way cautiously, but directly, to the log hut of his white friend and entered without ceremony. Wicasta already was there, and he gave the newcomer cordial greeting.

"Now tell me all about it," he said in English, after Peninah had flung himself wearily on a pile of furs at one side of the room. "Where did you see that white buffalo? What sort of a place was he in? Was

he dead or alive? Why couldn't you get him? What killed your warriors?"

"It was in the Land of Great Smoke, fifteen days of hard war-party travel toward the setting sun," replied Peninah. "It is a country of hills that reach to the sky, and of valleys that sink deep into the earth; of rushing rivers and thundering waters; of fire, smoke, and steam. It is a land of much life and of sudden death. In it is one place very narrow, very deep, most of the time very dark; nothing grows in it, and its bottom is covered with bones. Bad smells come from it, many and various; whoever enters it comes forth no more, but quickly dies. Men have done this and many beasts; also birds have dropped dead while flying across it. Even the great wise one, the old buffalo bull, will sometimes enter this place of bones; for, lying in it, I saw the dead bodies of three such. Of them one was white."

"And the others were not?"

"No. They were such as may be seen every day."

"But one was truly white?"

"Yes, though not of a clean whiteness. Its color was that of the melting snow, broadly streaked with a dirty yellow."

"Just so. Did you see any other white animals in this place of bones?"

"Only where lay the white buffalo were two dead

wolves, also white in streaks like a pinto pony; but of other bodies elsewhere not one was white."

"And you came near losing your life in that place?"

"Yes. Almost did I join in the long sleep of my fathers. Three of us started in together to skin the white buffalo. I stumbled and fell at the very entrance, so that for a time I slept. Certain others lifted me and carried me back, but the two who were with me pressed forward. When they also fell, two more ran to their aid, and all perished where they dropped. After that none would go in, but those who remained alive made haste to escape from the abode of such terror, taking me with them. That is all."

"Um! Evidently the place you visited is one of Nature's own laboratories where she produces chemical compounds on a large scale. I should say that your particular gorge must contain the carbon dioxide and chlorine departments. Ordinary buffalo in attempting to pass through, probably hunting a short cut to somewhere, is given happy despatch by CO_2 , or possibly by CO . He falls at the particular spot where an issue of H_2O , heavily charged with Cl , is working with the lime of previous bones to produce a bleaching agent, that shortly converts him into a priceless and most worshipful *Bisontis alba*. You note the sequence, of course?"

Owing to constant association with this white man

Peninah could speak English fairly well, and could understand the more common forms of its North American dialect; but, on the present occasion, his companion used words so entirely beyond his comprehension that he failed to catch a glimmer of their meaning and could only stare in blank silence.

“Never mind,” laughed the other. “The only matter with you is that you are too sleepy to understand plain talk. But I’ll tell you what to do. First, go home, turn in, and make up for lost sleep. Next, report to the chiefs that you have concocted some extra strong medicine and had a straight vision of white buffalo that renders it imperative for you to return at once to the Land of Great Smoke. Then make up a party of new hands; don’t enlist one of those who went with you before, and hit the trail. I will go with you, and when you have safely landed me beside that Golgotha of yours I will guarantee to hand out, within a very few days, the finest specimen of a white buffalo skin ever seen this side the Missouri, or the other side either, for that matter. Do you understand?”

“Yep. Sabe plenty. I take one time more the white buffalo trail, and Wicasta comes also. He make big medicine and catch white buffalo sure. We fetch him home. Then we fight Sioux and lick um, lick um, lick um!”

“Well, I didn’t say anything about the fight Sioux part, and I would advise that you let those chaps alone,

no matter how many white buffalo you have in storage. That is, unless they attack you first. The other part of your understanding is all right, though, and you shall have your heart's desire if there is any virtue in chemistry."

CHAPTER VI

OFF FOR THE LAND OF GREAT SMOKE

PENINAH's decision to make a second trip into the dreaded Land of Great Smoke in search of a white buffalo, and the announcement that this time he was to be accompanied by the white medicine man, created a profound sensation in the village. Hundreds of young warriors were eager to join the new expedition but only a dozen were chosen, for it was desired to move with the utmost speed, and the greater the number to be fed the more time must be wasted in hunting. But three days were allowed the members of this chosen band for preparation; and at the end of that time, having left the village separately, they met at a previously named rendezvous several miles away.

To this point also came Wicasta, eager for the undertaking, but heavy-hearted from his recent parting with the little Hanana, who had clung to him with tears in her blue eyes and baby pleadings that she, too, should go. It was their first separation since she had become old enough to feel a disappointment at being left, and the young man was amazed to discover how deep-rooted was his love for this bit of humanity that had learned to call him father.

Each member of the party was finely mounted, and each led a still better horse, to whose back was bound a light pack of provisions. This was their only baggage, for, though they might be absent for months, the wilderness itself would supply all their needs. Only, Wicasta carried equipment sufficient to load two horses, but none of the others knew its nature, nor on the whole journey did they see him make use of it. Instead of surrounding himself with luxuries, such as willingly would have been accorded to one of his race and position, he lived as his wild companions lived, cheerfully sharing their hardships and privations, and winning their respectful admiration by excellence in the very things they most affected, such as feats of strength, endurance, and marksmanship.

Their departure from the village had been followed quickly by that of Bear Tooth, a medicine man of great repute among the Aricarees, though by birth he was a Sioux. He had been captured in early youth, adopted by a famous Aricaree medicine man, who had brought him up to his own trade, had married an Aricaree squaw, and had won his way to a high position in the tribe. At the same time he had not forgotten his native tongue, and occasionally, during periods of truce between the warring tribes, he visited his blood relations among the Dakotah. Through the coming of Wicasta he, more than any other of the Aricaree medicine men, had suffered loss of influence, and hating the

white man for this reason, Bear Tooth had become his principal enemy.

On the present occasion, when it became known that Wicasta himself was to go in search of a white buffalo robe, a thing that the Aricarees longed to possess more than any other object in the world, and that he had promised not to return without it, Bear Tooth was filled with keenest jealousy. Should this white man succeed in conferring so great a gift upon the tribe, then would his influence become greater than that of all other medicine men. No, it must not be. In one way or another the ambitions of this stranger must be curbed; and he, Bear Tooth, was the person to undertake the task, since he of all the medicine men had most at stake.

So he announced a journey to the Dog Dens, which lay to the eastward, where he would make medicine for the success of Peninah's party, and caused his squaw to set him across the Missouri in a bull-boat, with his war horse, which, next to that of Wicasta, was the finest of all the village herd, swimming behind. Landing on the opposite side, he galloped away, leaving the woman to return with news of his departure. As soon as he was hidden from her view, however, he altered his direction, proceeded downstream a few miles, and, recrossing to the side from which he had started, he hastened westward through the night in the direction taken by Wicasta and Peninah. For a night and a day he fol-

lowed their trail; and then, having learned its general course, he dropped it and headed toward an encampment of Southern Sioux, among whom he had certain acquaintances in his own line of business.

In the meantime Peninah's party unsuspectingly continued their way across a vast, treeless expanse of undulating plain, broken by innumerable coulees and crossed by many small streams that eventually found their way into the Missouri. Also these limitless pasture lands were alive with game that the haste of the travelers compelled them to pass unmolested. On the third day the monotony of the plains was broken by the Bad Lands bordering the Little Missouri. Here the white man gladly would have lingered to study the wonderful effects that had followed the prehistoric combustion of many thousands of acres of coal seams and the dropping into the fiery cavities thus created of broad areas of superimposed earth crust. Between the deep depressions thus made towered huge monuments of fused clay and sand, fantastic in shape, brilliant in coloring, and forming bewildering labyrinths in which one might wander for weeks without discovering an outlet.

But Peninah threaded these mazes as readily as the native of a great city traverses, without hesitation, its equally bewildering and far more deadly network of streets and alleys. Beyond the Bad Lands were other plains and deserts to be crossed; then foothills, moun-

tain ranges, and nestling valleys, rushing rivers, icy cold and crystal clear, until finally, after many days of arduous travel, the Aricarees came to the magic Land of Great Smoke.

It lay in the heart of rugged mountains, some close-wrapped in dark green mantles of forest, while others stood brazenly naked in the sunlight, and from all parts of it issued subterranean grumblings and roarings. In every direction floated clouds of steam, torrents of boiling water were hurled aloft, and great areas bubbled and seethed like the surface scum of a caldron. Fissured rocks emitted whiffs of sulphur, countless pools were charged with sparkling effervescence or dyed in prismatic colors by the varied output of underground laboratories, while everywhere were deposits of salts or of acid crystals gleaming white or richly tinted.

The road into this wonderland led through a high mountain pass and was deep worn by the feet of millions of visitors, human and brute, who during the centuries had sought its healing springs and salt licks, its thermal baths and effervescing waters. No other region in the world was so stocked with game, and nowhere else was it so little hunted. Buffalo and elk are not superstitious, but ignorant human beings always are; and though the Indians of both plain and mountain frequently visited this chosen abode of evil spirits, they always accomplished their errands with dispatch, and departed again as speedily as possible.

Thus, as the little band of Aricarees led by Peninah descended from the mountain pass and came to one after another of the hissing, spouting, bubbling marvels of the region, the white man could not find words to express his wonder and delight; but his Indian companions advanced in apprehensive silence, grasping their weapons tightly and casting furtive glances to every side. Finally their increasing fears caused the leaders to make camp several miles short of their ultimate destination, the dreaded Place of Bones. During that night Wicasta was the only member of the party who slept, the others remaining nervously awake, starting fearfully at the unaccountable sounds heard in every direction, and vowing that if they were permitted to greet another dawn never again to intrude upon that land of the Oki.

With earliest daylight the white man was eager to press forward, but many of the others protested, declaring that they would rather spend the remainder of their lives hunting for a white buffalo on the open plains than to secure one by passing another night in that dreadful place. Finally Peninah effected a compromise. If they only would push forward as far as the Place of Bones, he himself would lead them away from this evil Land of Great Smoke before another setting of the sun. So they consented, and shortly afterward the entire party stood beside a rocky gorge, where seemingly a mountain had been rent asunder, and gazed fearfully

into its shadowy depths, as yet unlighted by the newly risen sun. Besides being narrow it was not over half a mile in length, and it formed the entrance into a valley, dimly seen from where they stood, which otherwise was inaccessible. The "Valley of Mystery" Peninah named it, at the same time declaring that neither man nor beast had ever entered it. "Only birds may fly in," he said.

With increasing sunlight the shadows of the gorge were dissipated, until at length its bottom was visible. It indeed was paved with bones bleached to snowy whiteness, and throughout its length was no sign of verdure nor of life, but death everywhere was in evidence, for, in addition to the bleached bones, were many bodies of animals in various stages of decay.

Peninah indicated the spot, very near the entrance, where he had fallen and been overcome by the noxious vapors of the gorge. Also he pointed out, farther on, an indistinct mass that he felt sure was the white buffalo by which he had been tempted to make entry into the death trap; but he could not locate the remains of the Aricarees who there had lost their lives. Neither was another white buffalo to be discovered in any part of the gorge visible from where they stood.

To Peninah this absence of the thing they had come for was so disappointing that he regarded it as a calamity, but his followers were greatly relieved that now there was no reason for remaining in so dreadful a

vicinity. Only Wicasta seemed not to care one way or another. From the moment of first sighting the gorge he had been joyfully sniffing the tainted air, tasting the earth at his feet, and peering intently into the depths before him. Now he startled his English-speaking companion by exclaiming:

“It is a wonderful place, Peninah! Simply wonderful! I must have at least a week of it.”

“You mean you would stay here?”

“Yes. Certainly. Of course. What do you suppose I have traveled all these weary miles for?”

“But there is not any white buffalo.”

“There will be, though. I promised you one, and I’ll have it ready inside of a week.”

“My young men will not stay. Even now are they anxious to be gone.”

“Let them go to thunder! Who cares what they do? I tell you I am going to stay, whether any one else does or not.”

In the end it was agreed that a carefully concealed camp, furnished with Wicasta’s belongings, should be established for him in the vicinity of the gorge by which he was so fascinated, while the remainder of the party should retire beyond the pass through which they had entered this region of terror and there wait seven days. They would spend their time in hunting the abundant fur-bearing game of that region, while Wicasta should be allowed to “make his medicine” without interrup-

tion. Even his food would be furnished by the hunters, and Peninah should bring it to him each day. At the end of a week, whether he had or had not redeemed his promise of securing a white buffalo skin, the entire party would set forth on their homeward journey.

The terms of this agreement were carried out so promptly that, within an hour, a well-hidden site beside a spring of pure water had been found; a lodge, in which was placed Wicasta's property, had been erected; his three horses, Don Felix, the superb black stallion presented to him by Chief Two Stars, and the two pack animals, had been hobbled in a nearby pasture; and the Aricarees had taken their departure, leaving the white man sole human occupant, so far as he knew, of the wonderland of Great Smoke.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE PLACE OF BONES

ON being left alone the white man began at once to study the phenomena of the gorge to which the Indians had given a name signifying the Place of Bones. From his private stores he produced a wide-mouthed glass bottle or jar, together with an elk hide, and from the latter, by cutting it in circles, he fashioned a stout cord, more than one hundred feet in length. Making one end of this fast about the neck of his bottle, he lowered it over the edge of the gorge at the point where he first had gazed into its gloomy depths. When the bottle rested on the bottom, he marked the distance by tying a knot in his cord. Then drawing the bottle to the surface, he cautiously smelled of its contents, though to all appearance it remained empty.

“Whew!” he exclaimed, turning his head quickly away and inhaling a deep breath of fresh air. “As I thought, CO₂, or worse. Now for the thickness of this death blanket.”

Emptying the jar of its invisible contents, he partly filled it with sand, into which he thrust a home-made candle, several of which he had brought with him from

the Aricaree village. Lighting this, he again lowered the jar, causing it to move very slowly as it approached the bottom. All at once the candle-flame began to burn blue, and he stopped paying out line. Then the flame expired, and he made another knot.

“Distance between the knots about five feet. H-m! By avoiding low places a tall man might wade through in safety,” commented the investigator. “Certainly one on horseback could ride through all right, if only he could persuade the animal to hold his head up.”

The man's next move was one that his Indian friends would have deemed simply suicidal, for it was nothing more nor less than a deliberate walking into the gorge from its upper end. The only thing he carried was his bottle-candlestick with its taper lighted. A short but steep descent brought him to the first of the bones by which the floor of the passage was paved to an unknown depth. At this point his candle was held low down; but, as he made a cautious advance and its flame began to burn blue, he gradually raised it until finally it was held on a level with his breast. He now was half-way through the gorge and had reached the confused heap of skin and bones that Peninah had declared to be the remains of a white buffalo. It lay where a trickle of water, issuing from a side cleft, disappeared into some other subterranean passage, and here the air was scented by an odor distinctly different from any other that had come to his inquiring nostrils.

“Cl,” muttered the chemist; “and here is the plant that, perhaps once in a generation, produces a white buffalo. But what I don’t understand is how any animal with breathing apparatus held lower than that of a well-grown horse ever gets this far.”

A still greater puzzle was offered by the abounding evidence that animals not only had forced their way to this point, but had passed beyond it, as was evidenced by the trail of bones, continued until an angle of the wall hid it from further view.

“Having discovered the bleachery,” continued the man, who had formed a habit of putting his thoughts into words, “the next step is to contrive some way of using it without stooping. I can bring the skin to this place easy enough, but how I am properly to spread it, hair side down, and afterward how I am to watch it, turn it, and note the changes that will take place, without putting my head within the fatal gas, is a problem promising to require considerable thought.”

As standing in a poisoned atmosphere that might at any moment rise and overwhelm him was not a choice position for profound meditation, the man carefully retraced his way to pure air and safety. As he did so he was struck by the utter absence of motion in the atmosphere of the gorge. Undisturbed by a breath, it was as lifeless as that of a tomb; and it was a great relief to emerge from it into the brisk breeze of the upper world.

Once outside he found himself oppressed by weak-

ness and a violent headache. Reaching his camp, he swallowed an alkaline powder, ate a hearty meal of food already provided, and felt better. Then he slept for an hour, and awoke so refreshed that he determined to penetrate the gorge once more before nightfall.

This time he bore on his back a fine buffalo skin, including head and horns, that he had brought from the distant Aricaree village. He also carried his improvised safety lamp, a precaution that proved to be well taken, since by means of it he found the level of the deadly gases to be a full inch higher than on his previous visit. In spite of this he made his way to the place that he termed "the bleachery," but was only able to drop his burden before the effect of the rising gases compelled him to beat a hasty retreat. Finally emerging from the awful trap that had very nearly caught him, he found himself so sick and weak that only by a tremendous exercise of will did he reach his camp. Then he dropped to the ground, and almost instantly was buried in a profound slumber, from which he did not wake for many hours.

When next Wicasta became conscious of his surroundings night was far advanced toward morning, as was indicated by the full moon sunk half-way from the zenith to the western horizon. Again did the man find himself hungry, and this time he appeased his appetite with a strip of dried buffalo meat, eaten raw. He did not care to risk the making of a fire, nor did he, at that

moment, wish to take time for cooking. The problem of the gorge and how he might utilize its chemical treasures still remained with him, to the exclusion of all other thoughts. So, even as he ate hungrily of his strip of meat, he picked up his rifle and strolled forth to view once more the scene of his perplexities.

Reaching the point from which he first had looked into the gorge, he remained for some minutes motionless, leaning on his rifle and gazing into the narrow depths. The pathway of bones beneath him gleamed white in the moonlight, but there was no sign of life, nor was there a sound to break the stillness, save only those caused by subterranean ferment, to which he already had become accustomed. There was, to be sure, a continuous rushing noise, as though of wind, that seemed to come from the gorge itself; but he felt no breeze, and remembering the dead stillness of the atmosphere when he had trodden the path of bones, he concluded that the sound must be caused either by steam or escaping gas.

Suddenly he was startled by a clatter of hoofs, and turned in time to see an elk running for life, with antlers laid flat on his back, and several big timber wolves in silent but hot pursuit. The chase was headed directly for the mouth of the gorge, and in another minute it had dashed down the steep declivity and, with flying leaps, had entered the dread portal.

Fascinated, the spectator leaned far forward, mo-

mentarily expecting to see both pursued and pursuers yield to the deadly influence of the place and fall, never more to rise. To his amazement they did nothing of the kind. Instead of falling, or even faltering, they seemed to fly with added speed along the white pathway, and in another minute they had disappeared behind the angle that cut off farther view.

The man rubbed his eyes and gazed about him doubtfully. Was he still asleep and dreaming, or had he witnessed a miracle? If he had not heard the clatter of the elk's hoofs, the rattle of the bony pavement, and the panting of the wolves as they ran with lolling tongues, he might have deemed them the ghosts of defunct animals; but he knew that he had gazed upon flesh and blood. He also knew that this same flesh and blood had passed unharmed through what he had ample reason to believe was an accumulation of deadly gases at least five feet in depth. By all the laws of chemistry every one of those animals should have dropped dead before they had advanced fifty feet into the gorge; and yet they had galloped through it as though it were filled with the purest of air. Here was a mystery greater than any yet offered by that land of wonders, and one promptly to be investigated.

Thus thinking, the man, with rifle in the hollow of his arm, left his elevated post of observation and hastened to the declivity leading into the gorge down which elk and wolves had flung themselves but a few

minutes before. The sound as of wind was much more distinct here, and he had taken but a couple of downward steps before he became conscious of an inrush of air from behind. It grew stronger as he advanced, until at the bottom he found himself hurrying before a blast that swept through the gorge with all the force of a gale, driving before it all noxious gases and filling the place of death with pure, life-giving air. Thus was the apparently unsolvable problem of the elk and the wolves simply explained, though the cause of the blast, which, as the man afterward learned, blew nearly every night, and always in that same direction, remained for the present undiscovered.

Assuring himself by repeated tests that the passage of the gorge now was perfectly safe, so far as its atmosphere was concerned, our investigator hastened to the place where he had dropped the buffalo skin, unrolled it and spread it to his satisfaction. Then curiosity led him to continue his exploration of the gorge to its farther end, where a sharp acclivity, similar to the one at the entrance, gave access to the Valley of Mystery. By the uncertain light of the rapidly sinking moon he could gain no idea of its size or shape, and he had several most excellent reasons for not carrying his investigations further just at that time.

One was that the bottom of the trough-like gorge was considerably depressed near its valley end, and he realized that when the gases should again collect they

might at that point completely submerge a man on foot. Thus, should the air blast be interrupted, a return through the gorge would be rendered impossible. Nor did he then know whether the gale of that night was a thing of regular or exceptional occurrence. So, if he got caught in the valley, he might be compelled to remain there for an indefinite length of time. Another reason for returning promptly was that the force of the life-giving air blast was sensibly weakening, and a third was the necessity of being on hand to meet Peninah when that young Indian should make his promised visit.

Thus thinking, our explorer regretfully turned back from the very portal of the valley that no man ever had entered and hastened to retrace his course over the pathway of bones, now indistinct with shadow. With the first coming of dawn he regained his camp, well satisfied with the night's work. At the same time he was determined to seize the very first opportunity for another and much more extended trip into the enchanted valley whose secret he alone had unlocked.

CHAPTER VIII

DON FELIX GIVES WARNING

ACCORDING to promise, Peninah appeared about noon, bringing with him a liberal supply of meat, and remained for an hour. He was curious to learn if his friend had as yet discovered a white buffalo, and he looked gravely skeptical when informed that while the animal himself had not been seen, its trail had been found and was being hotly followed. After meditating this statement for a time, he announced that he might not come again for several days, because of his young men, who desired to visit a stream some distance north of their present camp, that was said to abound with beaver. White traders on the Missouri were paying what seemed to the Indians fabulous prices for beaver skins, and the Aricarees were desirous to make the most of the present opportunity for gathering a harvest of the precious pelts. As Peninah was the responsible leader of the party, the strict rules governing such a position demanded that he accompany his warriors wherever they went. He apologized to his friend for the necessity, and begged him to join the expedition; but this Wicasta declined to do, saying that he was well

satisfied to remain alone where he was, and the more time that was allowed him to make his white buffalo medicine the better pleased he should be. He felt perfectly safe in that place where no Indian cared to pass the night, and he only stipulated that when the beaver hunters were ready to start for their distant home he should be given a full day in which to prepare for departure.

The truth was that he did not care to tell even Peninah of his discoveries in the gorge, and was more than pleased at the prospect of a few uninterrupted days in which to explore the Valley of Mystery.

So Peninah departed, and the white man, once more left alone in the Land of Great Smoke, began making preparations for his own adventure. While leaving his lodge standing, he made, at some distance from it, a cache or hiding place for such of his belongings as he did not propose to carry with him.

From time immemorial the cache (from the French *cache*—to hide—and pronounced “kash”) has been to the American Indian what a storage warehouse is to his white brother, a place of safe deposit for goods not immediately needed. The cache may be prepared in a hollow tree or log, in a cave or rocky crevice, or even in a snow-bank; but the most artistic construction is that of the plains dweller who possesses none of the natural hiding places so common to hills and mountains. When he decides to make a cache, he selects a

dry, grass-covered clay bank, near a running stream, covers the vicinity of his proposed digging with blankets or robes, and with his hunting knife carefully cuts out a two-foot circle of sod. This, with the loose soil directly beneath it, is removed to a place where it is safe from disturbance, and carefully covered from the drying influence of the sun. The workman next digs straight down about three feet, and then begins to increase the diameter of his hole until he has a bell-shaped chamber of size sufficient to contain his goods. During this digging every particle of earth is handed out, heaped on a blanket, and carried to the stream, where it is thrown in, to be borne away by the current.

The chamber thus excavated is lined with bark, grass, sticks, mats, or skins, and the goods, well aired, are placed within. A hide is stretched over them, and any kind of dry material is tramped down above it until the orifice is nearly filled. Then the loose soil, that has been saved, is put back and solidly packed, at the same time being frequently sprinkled with water to destroy the scent. Finally the sod cover is fitted into place, exactly as it was, the surrounding blankets are removed, every footprint is obliterated, every blade of grass that has been crushed or bent is restored to a natural position, and the locality is abandoned for a night. If on the following morning the cache has not been disturbed, it is left for good, not to be revisited until the necessity for reopening it arises.

While Wicasta's cache was an affair much simpler than this, it was constructed with such care that its preparation occupied the remainder of the day, and night was at hand before he was ready to begin his exploration. He had decided to enter the valley on horseback, riding his splendid buffalo hunter, but leaving the two pack ponies in pasture where they were. Consequently, shortly after sunset, he rode to the entrance of the gorge and began a cautious descent of its steep slope. He hoped to find the current of air that had so materially aided him the night before again in operation, but was doomed to disappointment. Not a breath stirred in those gloomy depths, and suddenly Don Felix, throwing up his head with a snort of terror, stood still, refusing to advance another step.

"Right you are, old boy," said his rider soothingly. "There is danger, and plenty of it. I believe we could ride through safe enough, if only you would continue to hold up your head; but there is no necessity to take the risk."

Regaining the top of the bank, they waited, the man sitting on the ground with his back against a boulder, and the horse, at the end of a rope, cropping such grass as he could reach. Slowly the hours passed. The moon rose and flooded the silent place with mystic light, the horse ceased nosing the scanty herbage, and, returning to his master, stood above him with drooping head. The man himself alternately dozed and, starting into

wakefulness, listened for the rush of wind that should assure the safety of his road. Of other dangers than that of the gases he had no thought.

During one of his brief periods of dozing Don Felix half turned, and, with ears pricked forward, began eagerly to sniff the night air. Then he lifted his handsome head and woke the echoes with a shrill neigh, which was immediately answered from no great distance. That is, an attempt was made at an answer, but it ended abruptly, as though choked off. Wicasta sprang to his feet in time to see a couple of human forms glide across a patch of moonlight and disappear in a black shadow. Then came the twang of a bow-string, and an arrow flew so close that he heard its venomous hiss. At the same moment a dozen or more horsemen swept into view, and, breaking into full cry, like a pack of hounds sighting their quarry, bore directly down upon him.

Leaping to the back of his own horse, the white man made a dash for the only possible avenue of escape, the declivity leading into the grewsome Place of Bones, and his pursuers uttered yells of derision at the sight. This time, Don Felix, maddened by the pain of a second arrow that quivered in one of his haunches, made no protest, but flew down the white pathway like a whirlwind, snorting and holding his head high as he went.

The Sioux, for this was a band of those dauntless

fighters, accompanied by Bear Tooth, the Aricaree medicine man, reached the end of the gorge in time to see the rider, whom they had believed doomed to certain death, disappear behind the angle already mentioned. They could hardly credit their eyesight. And yet his figure had been perfectly distinct, so that all had seen it. They believed it to be that of Wicasta, the white medicine man, whose fame had spread to every Sioux village, and whose scalp had been promised them by Bear Tooth, his enemy. If it was indeed he, and he could traverse the Place of Bones in safety, might not they do the same? One of the dismounted warriors made the attempt, but fell at the foot of the declivity, and was barely dragged back in time to save his life by two comrades, who held their breath while they rushed down and clutched him.

Perhaps a man on horseback might succeed where one on foot had failed, and a venturesome young warrior advanced to the trail. His pony snorted with terror and balked at entering upon the white pathway, but was forced forward. Quivering, and showing every sign of a deadly fear, the animal advanced slowly some fifty feet, and his rider turned to glance triumphantly back. At that moment the terrified animal lowered his head as though to sniff at the white things on which he was so gingerly treading. As the deadly gases entered his nostrils he uttered a choking scream, reared, wheeled with such sudden violence as to un-

seat his rider, and dashed madly toward a place of safety.

The unfortunate young warrior had taken the precaution to secure himself to his horse by means of a broad leathern band, and thus he now was dragged back to his horrified friends head downward. By the time he reached them he was dead, and they were convinced that the human figure seen by them to traverse without harm the pathway of bones was either a spirit or a magician of such power that death could not overcome him. As both evil spirits and magicians are most to be dreaded at night, that neighborhood was not at all to their liking, and despite certain feeble protests uttered by Bear Tooth, the entire party rode hastily away, taking their dead with them. Nor did they halt until they were well beyond the limits of the Land of Great Smoke.

In the meantime, Wicasta, unaware of the departure of his enemies or of what had happened to them, continued his furious ride through the gorge to the Valley of Mystery. All the way, Don Felix, as though realizing wherein lay the danger, carried his head high, and only at the very end of the white pathway, in the depression noted by our explorer on his previous visit, did he inhale a breath of the deadly fumes. For an instant he staggered; then, gathering his energies for a supreme effort, he leaped forward and gained the slope leading to safety; with another forward plunge,

he fell, but his head lay within the zone of pure air, and a few long breaths so revived him that he was able to regain his feet. Then his master led him slowly on into the beautiful valley that was believed never before to have been trodden by the foot of man.

Feeling secure from present pursuit or molestation, our explorer prepared to pass the remainder of the night under a fine oak that stood a few hundred yards beyond the mouth of the gorge. Here, after picketing Don Felix, he spread the only blanket he had brought, and slept without interruption until daylight.

The succeeding four days were delightfully spent in a thorough exploration of the Valley of Mystery, which to this first intruder seemed a veritable Garden of Eden. It was very nearly circular in shape, with a diameter of about five miles, and was entirely walled by precipitous mountain sides that rendered it accessible only by sheer drops from perilous heights, unless one came through the gorge, which also afforded the only means of egress. It was a place of trees and flowers, of green grass and abounding springs; also it was a place of beasts and birds as tame as they must have been in the original Garden of Eden when the original man called them up to be named. While the birds came and went at will, the beasts or their progenitors must have drifted in through the gorge at times when it was free from gases, and never been able to note the proper hour for escape. That many former occupants

of the valley had attempted to leave it was evident from the bones in the gorge, which were fully as plentiful at that end as at the other. And it was fortunate that this had been the case, else the little valley would be crowded to suffocation with animal life.

So far as Wicasta could discover, there were but two drawbacks to this paradise; one was its awful loneliness and the other was its almost tropical heat on sunny days from noon until midnight. On the other hand, its atmosphere from midnight until noon was delightfully cool and bracing, and our explorer shrewdly suspected that these conditions had much to do with the air blast which at times made the Place of Bones a safe thoroughfare.

One night during his stay in the valley, when he discovered the conditions to be favorable, he ventured into the gorge for a look at his bleaching buffalo skin, and found the process very nearly completed. He did not continue to the farther end of the passage, for fear lest it still should be occupied by his enemies, and as it was not yet time for the Aricarees to be back from their expedition against the beaver, there was nothing to be gained by venturing into dangerous territory.

Finally, however, the time limit expired, and he determined to make an effort to rejoin his friends. At the very outset he encountered an unforeseen difficulty, for Don Felix stubbornly and absolutely refused to enter the gorge. Neither persuasion nor blows would

induce him, and at length Wicasta was regretfully obliged to proceed on foot, leaving his beloved horse behind. The life-giving gale was blowing in his face, so that he could follow the trail of bones in safety; but when he reached the now completely bleached buffalo skin a new difficulty presented itself. He wanted to carry it out, but was already so heavily burdened by his rifle, together with his entire stock of ammunition, that he found the extra weight too much for that rough road. Which should he leave behind?

CHAPTER IX

SCALPED AND LEFT FOR DEAD

THE buffalo skin, with its head and horns, was in itself a load, and Wicasta had proposed to carry it out on horseback. He already was burdened by his heavy rifle and his stock of ammunition, of which he had a very liberal supply and which he had deemed too precious to cache. So he had taken it with him into the valley, and now was bringing it out again. At length he decided to leave in this place of safety that which he considered of greatest value, carry out the buffalo skin, and return for his ammunition.

While only a suspicion of reflected light from a late-rising moon found its way to the bottom of the gorge, the white pathway was readily traceable, and the young man had no difficulty in finding his way out. At the point where he had been surprised and attacked a few nights earlier he made a long halt and listened. Then he again advanced noiselessly, and always keeping in deepest shadows, to where he had left his lodge. To his amazement it stood still, and, so far as he could discover, none of its few contents had been removed or even handled. This was so encouraging that he was

tempted to go for a look at his precious cache, and here he found further cause for satisfaction, it, too, proving to be unmolested.

As the man turned from it, with the intention of going back to the gorge after the precious property left there, his heart sank like lead, for he was confronted by a human figure, with leveled rifle pointing directly at him. Although he knew the movement could not save him, he involuntarily leaped to one side; whereupon the menacing figure uttered a low laugh and said:

“It is, indeed, my friend the Wolf-Killer. I was almost sure, but not quite.”

“Whew, boy! What a start you gave me!” gasped the other, wiping the cold sweat from his forehead as he spoke. “I’ve been jumped once by hostiles, and seeing you stand there, with the drop on me, gave the impression that they were after me again.”

“Yes,” replied Peninah gravely. “I know. They are Sioux, but five days ago they left the Land of Great Smoke. Also they found and followed the trail of Peninah to the River of Beavers, but they did not make fight with us, or even show themselves, for my young men watched without sleeping. After a time we slipped away from them and returned to this place without their knowledge. Therefore, it is to be believed that they have gone to their own country; but one can never surely know, and so I have come for my friend, that we may with all speed depart from this

place of danger. Even now are my young men waiting and impatient to be making the trail. Is my brother ready to go?"

"Why, no, Peninah, I can't say that I am," replied the other. "You promised me a full day's notice, you remember, and there are several pretty important things to be done before I can get away. That is, if you want to carry with you the finest white buffalo skin ever seen in a medicine lodge."

"Has my brother, then, got that for which we came?" inquired the young Indian eagerly.

"Certainly I have, and it's a beauty, too. Also it is well cured; only it ought to be rubbed thoroughly with alum before it is exposed to sunlight. Otherwise I am afraid the hair will come out. That's one thing I wanted a day for. Another is that I have left my buffalo hunter, Don Felix, you know, in a place from which it will take me some time to get him. My rifle, too; but if you will excuse me for about five minutes, I'll get that at once, for you slipping up on me as you did has proved to me how careless I was to be without it a single minute. Just you wait near the lodge until I come back."

With this the speaker hurried away toward the gorge, intending to recover his rifle and ammunition before the purifying air blast should fail; but, to his dismay, he was too late. With the waning of night it had died down, until it was barely perceptible, and he

knew that already the deadly gases had so risen above his treasures that he might not recover them except at a risk that he did not care to take. So he returned empty-handed to the lodge, where Peninah awaited him.

"You see I didn't get them," he said, "and I can't before the coming of another night. Nor can I catch Don Felix before that time. So we'll have to wait."

"Perhaps it is not worth while," replied Peninah. "Is that the skin of the white buffalo?"

Here the speaker pointed to a vague bundle on the floor of the lodge that was just becoming visible in the early dawn.

"Yes, that is what we came for, and I want you to tell me if ever you saw a prettier."

With this, Wicasta brought the skin outside into the growing light and unrolled it.

The ordinary so-called white buffalo is of a dirty gray, and only white by contrast with his fellows; while the skin now displayed to Peninah's astonished gaze, though holding a decided tinge of yellow, was so much whiter than any he ever had seen as to draw forth an exclamation of delighted amazement.

"It is wonderful!" he cried. "Never have the Aricarees been possessed of a medicine so strong as this. But we must get it to our village with all speed. So precious is it that we may not delay for an hour, not even for Don Felix or your rifle. They easily can be replaced, but such a skin as this is worth more beavers

than could be piled in all the Aricaree lodges. Let us, then, take it and go away, leaving all else."

"But the alum?" objected the other. "Without a rubbing of alum for the present, and a subsequent soaking in alum water, it is in danger of spoiling, as I have warned you. I know where alum exists in plenty, and within half an hour I can fetch an ample quantity. If you will go and hunt up my pack ponies while I am getting it, then will we save time, and by sunrise, or shortly after, we can be off."

To this plan Peninah agreed; and while his friend set forth in one direction, he went in another. For some time he searched diligently, without finding a trace of the missing animals. Then, all at once, he came upon a place so full of sign that its news was as thrilling as that of a newspaper bulletin in war time. Sioux had been there, a half-dozen of them, within an hour. Moreover, they were of the party that recently had trailed the Aricarees to the river of beavers. Now they had once more entered the Land of Great Smoke, but from a new direction. Evidently they had been scouting in the direction of Wicasta's camp, when they discovered his ponies and appropriated them. Two of the number had ridden hastily away on the stolen animals, while the others had gone in a different direction.

With all this information, obtained during a few minutes of intense scrutiny of the abounding sign upon which he had stumbled, Peninah set forth at full speed

in the direction taken by the four warriors who remained on foot. His heart was heavy with the fear that their course would intercept that of the friend whom he had allowed to go on an errand alone and unarmed.

Nor were the young Indian's fears unfounded, for ere he had gone a mile he caught a glimpse of those whom he was following creeping with the stealth of serpents toward a solitary figure, that, unsuspecting of danger and with his back to them, was scraping up the crystalline deposits of an alum spring. Not only were the Sioux warriors advancing upon their victim, but they had gained striking distance; for, even as Peninah caught sight of them, one of their number leaped forward, plunged a knife into the white man's back, stooped over him, and directly afterward held aloft a dripping scalp of long brown hair. The murderer's fierce yell of triumph was also his death cry, for ere it was half-uttered it was echoed by a rifle shot from the forest, and the Sioux who had scalped Wicasta pitched lifeless across the body of his victim.

Barely pausing to note the effect of his vengeful shot, Peninah ran with the speed of a deer toward the lodge of his friend whose melancholy fate he had just witnessed and avenged. He must run, for his rifle was empty, and even were it loaded, he knew he would be no match for the three powerful warriors already hot upon his trail. He could not help his friend by re-

maintaining a single second longer, for he knew Wicasta to be beyond human aid. Had he not with his own eyes seen him killed and scalped? There could be no better proof that the friend, for whom he would gladly have laid down his own life, no longer had need of him. But there were others who did stand in urgent need of his counsel and aid. The young warriors who had followed his lead into that land of death and terror were, by his order, awaiting his coming, unsuspecting of danger, and to them he owed his first duty.

Also there was another thing, perhaps the most important of all. His expedition had been made to obtain for his people the greatly desired skin of a white buffalo. The priceless trophy had been found. He had seen it and had held it in his hands. It had been left in the lodge of Wicasta, where doubtless it still lay awaiting an owner. Peninah had not the heart to abandon this greatest of prizes without an effort toward its recovery, and it was this thought that turned his flying steps in the direction they now took.

At length he reached the lodge. All was quiet and as before. There was no sign of an enemy. A momentary pause for reassurance, and then Peninah stood within the slight structure. A single sweeping glance was enough to show that he had come too late. Others had been there before him, and the treasure was gone. He remembered the exact spot where the rolled-up skin had lain, and now that spot was vacant. Also other

things had been taken; in fact, the lodge was stripped to emptiness.

So instantly was all this made known to the young warrior that he was not within the lodge a second before he was out again and speeding over the trail that led away from this fatal Land of Great Smoke. If only he could rejoin his own band in time to set a trap for the murderers and thieves who so were upsetting his plans, there was a chance that he might recover the sacred talisman, and win a victory that, in spite of the loss of Wicasta, would still insure him a triumphant welcome to the distant village of his people.

But even this faint hope was dashed when he came to the place where he had left his young men, and it was plain that the luck of the white buffalo remained with those who possessed its skin. The place in which they had waited was empty, and there was plentiful sign that his warriors had been driven from it by a superior force of Sioux, who had followed in eager pursuit.

Late that night, or rather just before dawn of the next morning, Peninah wriggled his lithe body into the very camp of his enemies, where he snatched a scalp, stole a horse, and was riding madly away before his presence became known. That same day he rejoined his own party, and was hailed by them as one risen from the dead.

From that time on, a running fight was maintained

with the Sioux war party for hundreds of miles, without either side obtaining any great advantage over the other. Then the Dakotah disappeared, and the harassed Aricarees were allowed to pursue their homeward way in peace.

As they had lost more than they had gained, having left behind them the most powerful medicine man the tribe had ever known, besides the white buffalo skin that at one time actually had been in their possession, they were forced to enter the village with blackened faces and amid a sorrowful silence. Only from a nearby eminence rose the lamentations of Koda, the wife of Wicasta, and of the women friends who lent their voices to aid her mourning.

The downcast warriors had broken their orderly rank, and were dispersing each to his own lodge, when of a sudden a shrill clamor rose from the heart of the village. The squaw of Bear Tooth, the long-absent medicine man, was excitedly pointing to the horse from which Peninah had just dismounted, and claiming it as the one ridden by her man when last she saw him. Moreover, an ever-increasing throng of witnesses were raising their voices in corroboration of her claim.

CHAPTER X

AN OVERLOOKED FRIEND

WICASTA had been struck down in the early morning, and during the whole of that long summer's day, amid the brooding silence of the wilderness, his mutilated body lay motionless where it had fallen. It was somewhat protected from the direct rays of the sun by the form of the Sioux warrior whose moment of savage triumph had been cut short by Peninah's vengeful bullet. In one rigid hand the Indian still clutched a keen-bladed knife; but the bloody trophy, for which he had paid so dearly, had been snatched from him and carried off by one of his own comrades. So the bodies lay until sunset brought a refreshing coolness to the air. Then occurred a miracle. From the one lying undermost came a faint, sighing breath and a feeble movement, as though it strove to release itself from the burden by which it was weighted. But its strength was not equal to the task, and again it lay still.

Now arrived certain night prowlers of the wild in search of food, and attracted by the scent of blood. At first they circled and sniffed suspiciously; then, becoming bolder, they began snapping and tearing at the uppermost body. Finally they dragged it clear of the

other, and directly afterward they were treated to a spectacle that reduced their snarlings to a momentary silence. Half-terrified, half-curious, they stared with red eyes, while he who for so long had lain in the semblance of death slowly struggled into a sitting posture, which he supported with trembling arms, outstretched. He was weak as a babe, and dazed beyond comprehension of what had befallen. His slightest movement was accompanied by excruciating pains, and he felt that his head was covered with glowing coals, slow-burning their way into his sluggish brain. Also he was consumed by a thirst so intense that, at that moment, he gladly would have exchanged anything a human being may possess for a cup of water.

For a full minute he remained so motionless that the beasts, momentarily cowed by the coming to life of a man, their master, fell again, with low growls and snarlings, upon their interrupted feast. So close were they to him that their fetid breath was in his nostrils. To escape it he began, feebly and with infinite pain, to crawl away. Very slowly he moved, inch by inch, and without regard to direction, only vaguely he longed for a breath of untainted air. Of a sudden there came to his dulled ears a sound that to him was heavenly music, the rippling tinkle of running water.

Instantly was the poor wretch nerved to increased effort, and a moment later, with head plunged into a crystal flood, he was drinking, drinking as though he

never would stop, while the life-giving fluid penetrated to every fiber of his body. Only the necessity for breathing caused him to withdraw his head from those delicious waters. It mattered nothing to him that they were so impregnated with alum as to be well-nigh undrinkable under ordinary conditions. They were giving back to him his life, and that was sufficient. So he drank of them and bathed his wounds, and received accession of strength with each passing moment, until he even contemplated the prodigious feat of standing upright.

It took him several minutes to accomplish this task, but finally he succeeded, and his savage neighbors were so impressed that they suspended their feasting once more, and, slinking to a short distance, watched with growling apprehension to see what he would do next.

What he did do was to walk away from them, very slowly and with quick gasps of pain, but with an instinct for direction that finally, after what seemed to his tortured senses years of desperate effort, led him to the lodge in which he had parted from Peninah. He would have been disappointed at his friend's absence had his sufferings allowed the sensation, but they did not, and sinking to the earthen floor, he promptly fell into the merciful insensibility of sleep.

When next the man awoke another day had come and the sun was shining brightly from a height gained

by several hours of climbing. He was horribly stiff, and movement was painful beyond words. What he needed was a soft bed and clean linen, the most careful handling and the devoted attention of nurses trained to firm gentleness, cooling drinks and nourishing food appetizingly prepared, the skilled dressing of his wounds, absolute rest, and to have his thoughts diverted from himself. What he had was nothing, beyond the bare fact that he was alive. He must think of himself and for himself; whatever was to be done for him, he must do it. For a time he lay still, hoping against hope that Peninah would come; but after a while even this slight hope faded, and he knew that he was left alone in a boundless wilderness to live or die, according to the limits of his own resources. All at once it occurred to him why this was so.

“I am dead,” he said to himself. “That is, I was dead, and so Peninah left me. Now I have come to life, but he does not know it. How was I killed? It must have been by a knife-thrust in the back, for, though I can’t see the place, that is what it feels like. I wonder——”

Here the speaker’s meditations were formulated in medical terms, which we will not attempt to reproduce; but while he was diagnosing his own case, he suddenly became conscious of that other wound on his head, and lifted a hand to feel of it. As he did so, an expression of horror overspread his face.

“I have been scalped!” he cried aloud. “Not only killed, but scalped! Now am I outcast forever. Now am I indeed dead, so far as intercourse with the living is concerned. No wonder Peninah left me! No wonder neither he nor any of the others came back to look after me! What am I to do? What am I to do? Never again will the village receive me. Never again will one of its inmates speak to me! Even Peninah must refuse to do so; and Koda, my wife, would turn from me with horror. If I were to be seen, every hand would be lifted against me. I should be killed and thrown out like the vilest of dogs. It is the law, the law of the Aricaree which is enforced more certainly than any other. Often have I heard it discussed. Well do I know its terms. Even Hanana, my darling, my own, will be taught to shudder at thought of the monster who once was her father. Better that I had died. Better that I die now than attempt to live, a scalpless outcast!

“From my own race I cut myself off by my own act, and now am I equally cut off from the people of my adoption by no act of mine, but by a fate as cruel and unchangeable as the laws of Heaven. Woe is me! that I, Arnold Knighton, should have sunk to so low a depth. Arnold Knighton, of Harvard; Dr. Arnold Knighton, of Boston; Arnold Knighton, traitor to friendship; Wicasta, the Wolf-Killer; Wicasta, the great white medicine man of the Aricarees; Wicasta,

father of Hanana; now the outcast warrior, scalpless and nameless; a thing of horror, to be dreaded and shunned by all men; to be destroyed at the first opportunity like any other vermin; the bottommost dreg of humanity. O God! It is too much! It is unbearable!"

In these terrible reflections Arnold Knighton was not overstating the terms of the situation to which he had been reduced. From prehistoric times, among the American Indians, the trophy of hair known as the scalp has been held in higher esteem than life itself. Among certain tribes, by way of taunting defiance to an enemy, the head of the warrior was carefully denuded of all hair except the single tuft termed the scalp-lock, which was decorated and cared for as the owner's chiefest possession. To take or lose a scalp was of far greater moment than the taking or losing of life. No youth could be counted a man, much less a warrior, until he had torn at least one of these bleeding trophies from the head of an enemy. It was his patent of knighthood, his diploma, his commission, his reward for great merit, to be treasured and displayed upon occasion through all subsequent life, and finally to be buried with him as a passport to immortality.

On the other hand, among many tribes, and especially among certain of those dwelling west of the Mississippi, the greatest calamity that could befall a warrior was the loss of his scalp. Did he lose it to-

gether with his life, not only was his spirit debarred from the Happy Hunting Grounds of his people, but it must serve as a slave the spirit of him who by capturing the scalp had proved himself master. Even worse was the fate of the unfortunate who lost his scalp without at the same time forfeiting his life. No matter how great had been his prowess or how bravely he had striven in battle, with the loss of his scalp he had lost everything. No longer was he regarded as a human being, but as a ghost to be shunned by the living, who might not even look upon him without incurring the direst misfortunes. This was the law of the Aricarees, together with many others of the tribes of the plains; and in such doleful plight did he, known as Wicasta, now find himself.

So great was the mental agony following the discovery of his condition that it completely exhausted the man's slender store of strength, his senses reeled, and once more he sank into a state of unconsciousness. While his body thus lay to all appearance lifeless, his spirit traversed vast spaces, and in pleasant company. Thus once more he was with his parents and the friends of his youth. Again he was winning a victorious way through college. The girl he had loved smiled upon him, and with her stood Everett Wester, also smiling, as though his life had been readjusted to a plane of true happiness. Peninah and the new-made friends of later years gathered about him, their faces shining with

gladness; and last of all, but of greatest joy, came to him the child Hanana. Her baby hand clung tightly to his, and her blue eyes were fixed upon his face with an expression of perfect love. He held her in his arms, and her tiny fingers stroked his face. She kissed him, and at the touch of her lips the man who had prayed for death gradually became conscious that he was waking to a new life.

Although it was not yet night the sun was low, and the interior of the lodge was so dim that for some moments he could not make out what it was looming hugely above him. A touch as of velvet was on his face, but it was warm with life, and a hot breath mingled with his. He outstretched a hand, and the motion was answered by the joyful whinny of a horse who had at length found a dearly loved but long-lost master. One friend, overlooked in the man's anguish, remained steadfast, recognizing no change in the conditions of their friendship.

CHAPTER XI

BUILDING A HOUSE WITHOUT TOOLS

THUS it happened that, through great tribulation, Arnold Knighton was saved. His spirit, communing through a dream with the spirit of Hanana; had aroused a desire for life, and at the same time had reminded him that there still was much to live for. Having lost everything, he now had everything to gain. He had conceived himself friendless, and so had yielded to despair when, at that very moment, there came to him one of the truest friends a man can have. To find his master Don Felix had braved, alone, the terrors, he so fully appreciated, of the gorge. Without his gentle but persistent nosings it is doubtful if the man ever would have awakened from his sleep of despair. He had yielded to it with a willingness, and even a desire, to die; he awoke from it filled with the determination to live.

To begin with, he must have water, for again he was parched and consumed with intolerable thirst. Attempting to rise, he found that he could not, even to save his life, so stiff was he and so exquisite was the pain of the effort. Thus, like all the newly born, he

was again forced to creep on hands and knees, with much pain and frequent pauses for rest; but finally he gained the blessed spring near which his lodge was pitched. Don Felix accompanied him, greatly puzzled by his master's strange method of progression, but well content to have him once more alive and in motion.

Together they drank of the cool waters, and with each swallow the man could feel new life throbbing through his veins. He drank and bathed his wounds, and drank again. Then he realized that not only was he faint and weak from loss of blood, but from starvation. He had no idea what length of time had elapsed since his last meal, but believed it to be several days, and even now he could think of no way for procuring food. There was none in the lodge, and he had not the strength to hunt game, even were he armed, which he was not, his rifle still remaining in the gorge. He recalled that in his cache were a few food luxuries sealed in tin; but, in his present weakness, he might as well attempt the capture of a buffalo bull as the obtaining of provisions from that distant and securely fastened hiding place. Certainly starvation stared him in the face, confidently and with leering impudence, as though it said:

“I've got you this time, my friend, and you can't discover a loophole of escape.”

As the man sorrowfully admitted the truth of this statement, starvation slyly suggested:

“Unless you choose to sacrifice your horse; with your knife you might manage to kill him, and horse-flesh isn't at all bad eating, especially when one is as hungry as you are.”

This suggestion was so shocking that, had it come from another person, the starving man would have resented it with bitter words. As it was, he simply glanced at the animal's well-covered ribs, and sighed enviously. Don Felix still was saddled and bridled, and as his master looked up at him he lowered his head inquiringly. The bridle-rein came within Knighton's reach, and, aided by it, he struggled to his feet. While, in his weakness, he clung to the horse's neck, the latter thrust his head across the man's shoulder, and they rubbed cheeks.

“It was a cowardly thought!” exclaimed Knighton, “and if I had any blood left I should be red with shame. You dear, splendid horse! I would rather die any sort of death than attempt to save my wretched life at the expense of yours. No, sir! you are my friend; at present my only friend, and men worthy of the name don't eat their friends. If only I could get on your back, I'd— What's that! Not the package of meat that I made fast to your saddle in the valley? It is, though, and starvation is fairly whipped at his own game. Don Felix, you are an angel of light, and if ever a man had a truer friend in time of need, history has failed to record his name.”

Even as he spoke, Knighton cut loose the precious package of food with the knife that still remained in his belt, and it fell to the ground. Also he managed to relieve Don Felix of his bridle, whereupon the horse, as though no longer on duty, walked away in search of pasturage.

The man had a few precious matches in a water-tight case, and there was an abundance of fire-making material close at hand. Thus, within a few minutes, he was toasting, or rather scorching, in a clear flame, a thin strip of meat wrapped about a green stick. He ate this ravenously, and felt stronger. While so doing he had other strips toasting, and by the end of an hour after the presentation of Don Felix's princely gift he had made a "square meal," that, in its beneficial effects, recalled the first one given him by Peninah, nearly three years earlier, at the wood-yard on Fat Cow Creek.

From certain portions of the meat he managed to extract a small quantity of tallow, which he melted and applied to his wounds. Then he slept; and for a week thereafter this simple program of eating and sleeping was unvaried.

At the end of that week, thanks to his splendid constitution and simple habits, the life-giving air that he inhaled with every breath, and his own power of will, he was well on the road to recovery, with a portion of his strength already restored.

As soon as he was able to mount Don Felix he rode

to the place where he had been left for dead, and there, within a few paces of the alum spring, he found the clean-picked bones of the Indian who had scalped him. He looked in vain for the scalp itself, nor could he discover by what means his enemy had met death. He did, however, find the knife by which his own injuries had been inflicted, and he put it carefully away as the first bit of property acquired during his new life. Heavy rains having fallen and obliterated all trails, he could not learn what had become either of his friends or his foes; only it was evident that both had departed and that he was left alone in the Land of Great Smoke.

It was hard to become reconciled to a life of utter loneliness, and for a time he rebelled against the fate that had cut him off from his fellows. He knew that no tribe of Indians would receive a scalpless warrior, and he doubted if even the wandering trappers of the mountains would give him welcome, so completely had most of them adopted the Indians' habit of thought, together with their mode of living. No, there was no place for him among men short of the eastern bank of the Mississippi, and that was a part of the world that he might not visit for years to come.

If he lived, he hoped some time in the future to return again to the scenes of his boyhood and mingle once more with people of his own kind; but years must elapse first, and in them was much to be done. Already he had laid plans, wide and far-reaching, which, if he

could carry them out, would fill the coming years with useful activities, combined with much of happiness. Perhaps, too, they would not be years of such loneliness as was now promised. If only he could carry out his plans!

For the present he must remain where he was, since in all the world there was no other place in which he might receive a friendly welcome. Already summer was spent and the chill winds of autumn were blowing. In that region of high altitudes winter would come quickly, and he had short time to prepare for it.

In casting about for a location for a permanent camp, he had decided that, in spite of the dangerous approach to the Valley of Mystery, it was the most desirable place in all that region for his purpose. It was well-sheltered, well-stocked with game, and its very dangers assured its safety as a place of residence. So to the Valley of Mystery he began to remove his effects the moment his strength would permit. As he could work only at night, and on such nights as the air blast drew strongly through the gorge, it was a tedious task to transport his lodge and the contents of his cache to the new location. Also, as there now was no moon, the difficulties were greatly increased by the darkness in which he was forced to work. But for Don Felix—not only as a beast of burden, but as guide through the inky blackness of the gorge—Arnold Knighton's camp probably would have remained where it was, and he

would have stood a dozen chances of being "wiped out" before the end of winter. With the invaluable aid of his horse, the task finally was accomplished, and his lodge was set up under the tree that had sheltered him on his first visit to the valley. Of course, long before this he had secured the rifle and ammunition that kindly fortune had caused him to leave in the open, offering a well-nigh irresistible temptation to the cupidity of any who might chance that way, and yet absolutely protected from molestation by a human being besides himself.

To prepare a place in which he and his belongings might find shelter during the storms and cold of winter was a great undertaking. His time was short, he was inexperienced, he had no tools, and while he worked he must procure and prepare his own food. In spite of all this, before the streams froze solid he had accomplished the task, and was the proud owner of a commodious, weather-proof residence, steam-heated and provided with running water, hot and cold, as well as with an open fire. To be sure it had neither gas nor electricity, but then its owner did not approve of the former on the score of health, while the latter had not yet been introduced for house-lighting purposes.

This wonderful construction was partly a dugout excavated from the side of a hill and partly built of sods piled one on top of another so as to make walls six feet high and eighteen inches thick. The roof was

of poles, bark, sods, and earth. Issuing from the hill was a hot spring of unfailing supply and steady habits. It was not an explosive, geyser-like eruption, doing startling stunts at unexpected moments, but simply a quiet flow of hot water, apparently provided for just such an emergency as had arisen. By means of a ditch a portion of its overflow was so directed as to run through the new house, where it passed beneath a pavement of flat stones. Having thus provided "Sod Castle" with steam heat and hot water, the builder became so ambitious of further luxuries that he opened another ditch, nearly a quarter of a mile long, through which to conduct a stream of cold water. Also he dug in the hillside a fireplace, lined it with the same flat stones that paved his floor, and topped it with a little chimney of sticks and clay.

To accomplish all this digging and excavation Knighton had made hoes of elk shoulder blades, like those used by Aricaree women, and a wooden pick, with its sharpened point hardened by fire. What wouldn't he have given for an ax, a saw, a hammer, and some nails? "But," as he philosophically remarked to himself, "the possession of such luxuries would only cause me to long for others, and so on indefinitely, until self-reliance became merged in utter dependence upon the handiwork of someone else."

Thus thinking, he whittled wooden pegs for nails, used a stone hammer, and helped out his hunting knife

with fire in place of an ax. His most difficult piece of construction was a door, and it was especially for this that he wanted a saw. Not having one, he made of interwoven willows a basket-work door, which he afterward covered with buffalo hide. It was the procuring of this hide that took him out of his valley for the first time since he had sought its asylum, and it was while thus engaged that he acquired an ax, to say nothing of many other things.

CHAPTER XII

A CHEERFUL, RED-HEADED FIGHTER

NEVER had Arnold Knighton so felt his loneliness or so longed for human companionship as while on that buffalo hunt in the Land of Great Smoke. In his valley he had realized that there was no chance of encountering another human being, and, besides, he had been so busy over his house-building that he found little time for thinking of anything else. Now, in the outer world of people he experienced a keen disappointment at not meeting, or at least seeing, some of them. He knew that if he did run across any parties of red hunters he should carefully avoid them, while he had not the slightest hope of meeting with white men in this remote region which he believed known only to Indians. For all this he found himself searching for indications of human presence wistfully, and much more earnestly than he did for game.

So plentiful were buffalo in the warm valleys of that region that to kill them, when mounted on such a famous hunter as Don Felix, was one of the easiest things in the world. Thus, on his first day out, Knighton secured three, which were as many as he could care

for and utilize. At the end of two more days the skins of these animals, together with the meat of a fat young cow, had been removed to the valley, while the remaining products of the hunt were safely deposited in his old cache near the gorge entrance. Now there was no reason why the hunter should not return to the safety and comforts of Sod Castle. He need not even wait for night and the protecting air blast, since by this time Don Felix had learned to carry his head as high as possible while traversing the pathway of bones. But the loneliness of the valley appalled the man. In comparison with it a prison would be a place of cheerful companionship. As for its safety! Yes, of course it was safe enough, but just now safety did not appeal to this strong builder of castles and hunter of buffalo as it had to the nervous, recently scalped invalid, who had gratefully sought the protection of the valley some three months earlier. So, as he sat beside a small fire, over which he had just cooked his dinner, the lonely man pulled disconsolately at a very black pipe and thought unkind things about his valley.

Why had he been such a fool as to select it as a place of winter residence when, as he now knew, the outside world was so much pleasanter? Of course, it was too late now to make a change, and there was nothing to be done but crawl back into that dreary prison, where he would be buried, like a woodchuck in a hole, until spring. But he would not be driven in until he

was good and ready to go, that was certain; and for the present he chose to remain where he was. Hello! What was that, a far-away rifle shot? It couldn't be! Yes, it could, for there was another, and another. The world seemed to be coming his way after all, and perhaps it would be a good idea to meet it on the road.

In another minute Knighton had saddled Don Felix and was riding furiously in the direction of the shots that still sounded at intervals. Were they fired by red men or white? Was it a hunt or a fight? These questions repeated themselves over and over in the man's brain as he hastened to demand a share in whatever part of the world's work his unknown neighbors were engaged upon.

With all his eagerness, he had not wholly lost his prudence; and when he came within the sound of yelling voices he halted, left his horse in a clump of cedars, and began a reconnoissance on foot. A few minutes later he had topped a "hog-back" ridge and was peering cautiously down on a scene of startling interest. At the bottom of a narrow pass, directly beneath him, were Indian horsemen, how many he could not tell, dashing madly to and fro and yelling like fiends. At first Knighton could not discover what they were doing or trying to do. Then a rifle rang out from a place that he could not see, and following it came a laugh and the sound of a voice, rich with the brogue of old Ireland:

“Hooroo, ye red divils!” it cried. “There’s one more of yez gone, and I’m by no manes troo wid yez yet. Pass up the guns, b’ys. Do yez kape loading as fast as I kape shooting, and we’ll clane out the whole murtherin’ crowd before they know what’s happened them.”

“White men!” was Knighton’s mental exclamation. “Evidently in such desperate plight that they have gone crazy. If only I could help them out of their fix, and get them into the valley, what a different aspect the place would put on. I believe it will pay to try, and a bold bluff may work wonders. At any rate, company is worth fighting for, so here goes.”

With these reflections flashing through his mind, Knighton was running down the steep way he had just climbed, and within a couple of minutes he reached the place where Don Felix awaited him. In another moment he was on the back of the impatient stallion, speeding like the wind toward the point where at least one white man was shouting cheerful defiance to a horde of painted scalp hunters.

Among Arnold Knighton’s choicest possessions was a big army revolver, a weapon which, in one shape or another, dating back to the fifteenth century and made practical by Colonel Colt in 1835, still was a rarity to the Western plains. Knighton had procured this one from a trader who visited the Aricaree village just as Peninah’s expedition was about to start for the Land

of Great Smoke, and had paid for it an incredible number of beaver skins. In those days the metallic cartridge had not yet been invented, and though a poor substitute encased in paper was in use, even these had not been procurable among the Aricarees. So each of the six chambers of this revolver had to be loaded separately with powder and ball, while the six nipples were covered by as many percussion caps. As it thus took six times as long to load a revolver as it did a rifle, the weapon was not very popular, and Knighton had used his for the first time during his recent buffalo hunt. Then he had cleaned it, reloaded it for an emergency; and within an hour the emergency had arisen.

Now, as he rode, he drew this gun from its holster and looked to see that all its caps were in place. Even as he did so Don Felix swept into the pass and charged with thunderous hoofs upon a score of Indians who, gathered just out of rifle range, were making ready for another rush past the place they were besieging.

For a moment the startled warriors stared at the apparition of a fierce black horse, bearing a frightful figure clad in wolf skins, and apparently huge beyond anything human, bursting upon them like a bolt from a clear sky. For a moment only did they stare; then, panic-stricken and scourged by a torrent of bullets from a gun of such magic that it needed no reloading, they fled like so many scared rabbits. Past the white man whom they had regarded as their certain prey they

scampered without discharging a single arrow, lying low on their ponies' necks and urging them to frantic speed. Then they vanished as though the earth had swallowed them, and only a weird echo of clattering hoofs seemed to come from the upper air.

Knighton could not at once check his headlong speed, but he yelled a cheery encouragement as he flew past the scene of battle, and a hat was waved in reply, while a voice, so faint that it barely reached him, exclaimed:

“Glory be! It's a white man!”

The moment Don Felix could be persuaded that the chase was ended he was headed back to where his rider had caught a confused glimpse of men and horses. The place was a rocky alcove in one side of the pass, shielded from attack at all points except directly in front. Here it was barricaded by the bodies of several horses which were stuck as full of arrows as a porcupine is of quills. Riding up to this barrier, Knighton called out:

“Hello, inside! Why don't you show yourselves?”

His only answer was an absolute silence, made doubly impressive by the recent turmoil.

“Queer!” muttered Knighton. “I would have sworn that I saw a hat wave and heard a voice as I rode past.”

Don Felix was so excited by the smell of blood that he could not be persuaded near enough for his rider to see over the dead animals. So the latter finally dis-

mounted, made his horse fast to a tree, and returned to the place on foot. Clambering over the barricade, he was confronted by the sight of three human bodies lying in pools of blood. No other person was to be seen, and he was more than ever puzzled to account for the voice and waving hat of a few minutes before. At the back of the alcove he found a mule, alive and with a pack still on her back. She had been hobbled and thrown, so that she now lay helpless on her side. Cutting this animal loose, and finding no other sign of life, the mystified man returned to the three bodies and began an examination. They evidently were those of "mountain men" or "Free Trappers," so called to distinguish them from the employees of the great fur-trading companies—The Hudson's Bay, The Northwest, and The American. All were clad in buckskin, and two of them wore fur caps. These two were rigid and evidently had been dead for some time. The third body was that of a young fellow, almost small enough to be classed as a dwarf, whose red head was uncovered. This body, though bleeding from many wounds, still was warm with life, and beside it lay an old felt hat.

"This, then, is the chap who waved," soliloquized Arnold Knighton, "and evidently the effort exhausted his last remnant of strength. But he is worth saving, and I must get him out of here in a hurry, for the reds'll be back pretty quick to see what has happened. They won't run far after they get over their first fright

and find that no one is after them. As for these other poor fellows, they are too dead for anything else to matter, and I shall have to leave them as they are.”

The pack mule had scrambled to her feet, and now stood gravely regarding the stranger who seemed to have taken charge. To her pack Knighton added such things of value as came readily to hand, including guns and knives. Then he led her to where Don Felix was tied. To this place also he brought the limp body of the red-headed young chap, and lost several precious minutes in persuading his horse to receive the blood-tainted burden.

Knighton knew that every moment was precious, and while he strove with the stallion's obstinacy he also cast apprehensive glances down the pass. Nor was his apprehension groundless, for he had barely got his little procession started—Don Felix with his double burden in the lead, and the heavily laden mule following, as reluctantly as though she hated to go—when a fierce, quavering cry from the very crest that he himself had climbed a half hour earlier, gave warning that his movements were watched. He touched Don Felix with a spur, and the horse leaped ahead, just in time to avoid an arrow that came hissing down from the height. It grazed the mule instead, and caused her to dash frantically forward. As they gained the end of the pass, a backward glance showed the pursuit to have begun in earnest. Already two of the light riders, straining

every nerve to overtake him, were in sight, and he knew that many others must be close upon their heels.

Now how comforting it was to think of the recently despised valley, with its safety and its hospitable shelter. At present it was the only place in all the world for Arnold Knighton. If he only could reach it in time all would go well; if he failed to do so, everything would be lost. Outside the Valley of Mystery he had not the slightest chance for life against that yelling horde; once within its portals he would be as safe as though the width of a continent divided them.

“On, Don Felix! On, old boy! We’ve got to do it, and we’ve got to carry this man in with us!” he shouted; and the horse understood.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GUEST OF SOD CASTLE

OF all visitors to the Land of Great Smoke, the Indian tribe known as Blackfeet, who shared with their mortal enemies, the Crows, the title of "Pirates of the Mountains," were most familiar with its natural features. It formed a portion of the domain over which they claimed control and over every foot of which they had fought or hunted. An unfortunate collision between them and the first white men to penetrate their territory, the exploring expedition of Lewis and Clark in 1804, which resulted in the death of a Blackfoot warrior, had confirmed them in hostility to all pale-faces, and nothing so pleased them as to strike the fresh trail of a party of white trappers. They always followed it, and always the result was a raid, a massacre, a battle, or a scrap of some kind. In the present instance it had been a surprise, by which two trappers out of three had instantly been killed, while the third, about to fall into their hands, had been rescued by a gigantic stranger who appeared among them so suddenly that he seemed to drop from the clouds. Recovering from their first panic, and realizing that they had

fled before a single enemy, they faced about and started to retrieve the disgrace.

Then ensued the pursuit already recorded, in which the superior fleetness of two of the Blackfoot ponies carried their riders well to the front. So far in advance of their companions were these two that they were beginning to anticipate with misgivings an unsupported encounter with the mysterious white man. All at once one of them, to the astonishment of the other, checked the speed of his pony until he had reduced it to a walk.

“Do you not see,” he said, “whither the white fool is heading? In another minute he will enter the place of death from which is no escape, and we are not close enough to stop him. If he goes slowly, his horse may fall so near the entrance that we still may secure the scalps; while, if hotly pursued, his speed may carry him beyond our reach before he drops. As it is certain that they will die, let us await those who are behind and take counsel with them how to secure the spoils that surely will lie in the place of white bones.”

So these two waited, and they watched with equanimity the disappearance of Don Felix with his double burden, followed by the pack mule, down the declivity leading into the fatal cleft. As the fugitives were thus lost to view, the Blackfeet advanced confidently, but without haste, to look upon the deadly struggle that they knew must be taking place in the gorge. Others

of their band were joining them, and to these they were explaining the situation, with much merriment, when they reached a point from which they could see the pathway of bones as far as the angle.

In speechless amazement they looked at it, and then at each other. The unfortunate pack mule had fallen a hundred yards from the entrance, where she lay motionless and plainly visible; but of the black stallion and his rider there was no trace. In vain did the bewildered and bitterly disappointed savages advance along the side of the gorge to the very limit of human progress. They saw nothing, heard nothing, and could account in but one way for the phenomenal disappearance. The gigantic figure on a black horse, that had thrown them into a panic, eluded their pursuit, and now had passed in safety through the place of death, was no human being, but a malignant and powerful spirit. It was well known that such spirits existed, especially in the Land of Great Smoke, and often had the Blackfeet looked upon their work; but never before had one actually appeared among the living in broad daylight. The very fact that the mule following him had met with death where he had passed in safety was ample proof that he was more than mortal, and that in his hands they would be as helpless as the red-headed victim he had just borne away, doubtless for the purpose of devouring him.

A hurried exchange of these views threw the moun-

tain warriors into a second panic, so much greater than the first that they again fled, this time without awaiting the appearance of an enemy, nor did they draw rein until well outside the Great Smoke land, when a halt was compelled by exhaustion. Two days later they had rejoined the main village of their band, where they were excitedly telling of their fearful encounter and marvelous escape.

From that center of information the tale spread with inconceivable rapidity. First it was heard by the several bands of Blackfeet, by whom it was carried to their allies, the Arapahoes and Cheyennes. About the same time it reached the ears of those other mountain Indians, the Crows, Shoshones, and Bannocks. From the Arapahoes it was transmitted to the Sioux, and from the Cheyennes, by way of the Mandans, it at length reached the Aricarees. Thus, after much travel, did it come to the ears of Peninah, son of Two Stars, who, having heard it, sat for a long time thoughtful. Then he said:

“No evil spirit is it, but one of good will and helpfulness; for it can be no other than the spirit of Wicasta.”

So the spirit known to dwell in the Valley of Mystery, which lies in the Land of Great Smoke, and may not be entered by living man, received the name by which ever afterward it was to be known. At that same moment the name began to travel back along the

trails of the story that had come to Peninah, until finally it reached the lodges of the Blackfeet, and even they knew that the spirit who had foreborne to slay them was called "Wicasta."

In the meantime Arnold Knighton, having brought a wounded man to the safety and shelter of Sod Castle, cared for him with such skill that shortly he found himself possessed of a companion, so cheery in temper that loneliness was banished from the Valley of Mystery. The very first sound uttered by the red-headed patient in his new abode was a laugh, which to sober-minded Arnold Knighton proved almost as startling as a war whoop.

"For a sick man, you seem a merry one," he said.

"And why not? If ye'd woke from a drame of being burned at a stake, to find yersilf lying cool and comfortable, wouldn't ye be plazed enough to laugh at the joke?"

"I'll own I might be," admitted Knighton. "As it is, I am greatly pleased at the success of my heroic treatment; for, lacking stimulants, I have just given you a scalding hot bath, followed by an ice-cold douche."

Some time afterward, when the patient, refreshed and strengthened by food and sleep, again woke with a laugh, Knighton, smiling in sympathy, asked him what sort of a dream was the cause of his present merriment.

“No drame at all, yer honor, but just a habit I have.”

“A habit of laughing when you are in trouble?”

“Ye niver spoke a truer word; and it’s for the counteracting of me name, which is ‘Blue.’”

“That does sound rather doleful. Family name, I suppose?”

“It is, sir, and again it isn’t.”

“Were you christened Blue?”

“I was, more’s the pity; and it happened this way. Me mother was a Dooley, and she had a mort of brothers and cousins and uncles, whose names ran to colors, as ye might say. There was White Dooley and Black Dooley, Green Dooley and Brown Dooley, while another named Redmond was always called ‘Red’ Dooley. So it happened that when I was up for the christening, and the praste axed me father what name, the old gentleman, much frustrated, I being the first, says: ‘McHarty, yer riverence.’

“‘Av coorse, sthupidity,’ says the praste. ‘But it’s the given name I’m wanting. Is he a b’y or a girl?’

“‘B’y,’ says me father, ‘and the name’s a color. “Blue” it must be, for I heerd his mither the morn spaking av her little b’y blue.’

“‘As good as another,’ says the praste, who was weary for his dinner. ‘Blue McHarty I christen thee—’ So there I was, dyed indigo for life, and it’s a fight wid depression I’ve had ever since.”

At this account of a christening Arnold Knighton laughed for the first time in years. "McHarty," he said, "you were worth fighting for. I thought you would be when first I heard you laugh in face of the savages who were trying to kill you, and now I know I was right. If you feel strong enough, suppose you tell me how you happened to get into that fix."

"Sure, sir, I'm as strong as a goat, and it's a long story; but I'll make it a short one, more befitting me wakeness. Ye'll know, to begin at the beginning, that me father wanted to bring me up to his own profession, but I had no taste for it."

"What was his profession?" asked Knighton.

"He was a college man, and connected wid old Trinity in Dublin."

"Indeed! That's interesting. I am a college man myself."

"Are you, sir? But not of Trinity, maybe?"

"No. I am a graduate of Harvard."

"I've heerd of it, sir. A grand college! It must be somewheres in these parts, for I mind meeting wid a Harvard man, not more than a month ago, in the Bannock placer country. A very fine gentleman he was too."

"Did you learn his name?" asked the other carelessly.

"I did. It was Wester, though I heard say that he came from the East."

“Wester?” exclaimed Knighton, greatly startled.
“What was his first name?”

“I didn’t ax him, but I will the next time I see him.”

“Do you know his class? I mean in what year he was graduated?”

“Not to be sure of it; but he was a heavy man, much like yerself, and married, for I was told of the family he had at Fort Benton. I didn’t exchange words wid him, but I watched the argymint betwixt him and another gentleman, who remarked that a college-bred man was no good west of the Mississippi. I’d have questioned that meself, only Mr. Wester was so quick to get the drop that the other gentleman was apologizing before I cud draw.”

“I wonder if it can be possible?” reflected Arnold Knighton. “Of course not, though. But you haven’t told me how you happen to be out here fighting Blackfeet?” he added aloud.

“No more I haven’t, sir. Yer see, not caring to follow me father’s profession——”

“By the way, what was your father professor of?”

“He was assistant to the bursar, sir, what some would call a ‘scout,’ or more like a porter, and he looked after the young gentlemen.”

“Ah, yes. And you didn’t care for the life?”

“No, sir. I had more of a mind for foreign travel. So I left home unbeknownst, and went to Cork, a fine

city entirely, though, av coorse, not the aquil of Dublin. There I accepted a position as secretary to the provider of a ship bound for America."

"The provider of a ship?"

"Yes, sir. The gentleman who provides the meals. The one I assisted was of color, and at times quite black in the face."

"I understand. Go on."

"When we got to Montreal I resigned from the sea, and prepared to cross the continent by accepting another position in the providing line wid the company. Very fine people, sir, and I might have been wid them still, only that last winter was so cold on the Saskatchewan, I thought I'd get me a bit further south. Also I wanted to see something of the States before leaving America. So I hit the trail for Fort Benton, and a fine place it is, sir, though hardly aquil to Dublin. There I conthrafted a partnership wid two American gentlemen—the same that got wiped out the other day—God rest their sowls!—to carry on a fur business in this part of the States, and we were doing quite well when them red pirates jumped us. For a time I was fearful they would upset me plans; but, thanks to you, sir, I'm all right again."

"And what do you propose to do next?"

"I think maybe that, come spring, having seen quite enough of the States, I shall push me on to the coast and embark for Asia."

“But you know nothing of the States yet. You haven’t seen a single city. Surely you ought to visit New York and Boston, or at least St. Louis.”

“Why should I, sir? Sure no one of thim could aquil the great city of Dublin. Oh, yes, sir, I’ve seen quite enough of the States; and I must say, saving yer honor’s presence, that this place of yours here is the very finest I’ve encountered in traveling through thim.”

CHAPTER XIV

BLUE McHARTY'S SECRET

PERMEATED by the cheerful influence of Blue McHarty, Sod Castle was no longer a lonely place of residence, nor did it now present the aspect of a prison. All day long could be heard the laugh, the song, the whistle, or the brogue of the red-headed Irishman, who, from morning till night, kept himself busy with manifold tasks. In recognition of his self-admitted knowledge of the "providing" business, the culinary department of Sod Castle was turned over to him as soon as he was able to take charge, and he promptly instituted a number of pleasing reforms. For instance, he did away entirely with the cooking of meat by cutting it into thin strips, wrapping it about a green stick, and scorching it in a flame. This was the only method that had occurred to Arnold Knighton, and of it, after several months of trial, he had become heartily sick. He had attempted to make changes by roasting and broiling his meats, but in both cases he had only produced inedible cinders. Also he had thought of stews, but the water of his spring did not attain quite the boiling point, and he had no kettle that he could set on the fire.

Blue McHarty at once began the manufacture of cooking utensils, and within a week he could boil water, stew, roast, bake, broil, or fry. At first he boiled water in a skin bag by throwing in red-hot stones; but later he made rude pipkins of clay. In this manufacture Knighton assisted, and through his knowledge of chemistry soon succeeded in producing glazed ware that would withstand a great amount of heat. The new "provider" roasted by means of a green-wood spit, basting his meat with its own drippings, which he caught in a shallow earthen dish. He baked in a hole dug in the ground, half-filled with coals, and tightly covered with earth. He fried in an earthen pan, and broiled on a coarse broiler of wet twigs.

McHarty also proved himself a fairly good tailor, and turned out several very creditable fur and skin garments for his companion and himself during the winter. Among the Irishman's belongings, which Knighton recovered from the dead mule in the gorge on the first night after their escape from the Blackfeet, was an ax, several pairs of blankets, a dozen beaver traps, and part of the provisions with which his party had outfitted at Fort Benton. Thus Sod Castle now held a fair supply of cornmeal, sugar, tea, bacon, beans, and tobacco. All the flour, as well as the few cooking utensils of the trappers had been packed on one of the animals killed in the pass, and secured by the Indians during their retreat, as our friends afterward discov-

ered to their sorrow. But they were very grateful for the goods that had fallen to their share, which, added to what Knighton already owned, made them luxuriously comfortable for the winter.

Being in one of the finest fur countries of the world, and having traps, they collected a great store of beaver skins, which McHarty, who had learned the tricks of the trade, carefully prepared for market.

Leaving most of such work to his companion, Knighton devoted the greater part of the winter to his beloved chemistry, which he believed could be made to lend material aid in the carrying out of his plans for the future. To procure a number of substances needful to his experiments he was obliged to go outside the valley to various parts of the region affected by subterranean energies, and on these occasions he left Blue McHarty behind, much to that young Irishman's disgust.

"You couldn't help me," Knighton would say; "and I can't ask Don Felix to carry double all the time. Besides, it would be too dangerous, both in the gorge, where he would be more liable to stumble and throw us within the influence of the gases, and outside, where at any time we might have to depend upon his speed for our lives. So stay here, like a good fellow, and I'll be back before you have had time to miss me."

Having a particular reason for so doing, Knighton

had withheld from his companion the knowledge that the passage of the gorge was generally safe at night. At the same time he had given him full information concerning its dangers, and impressed upon him the fact that one could not safely pass through the gorges unless his head were at least seven feet above the pathway of bones. As Don Felix was the only horse in the valley he seemed also to be the only connecting link with the outer world, and he refused to be ridden by any person except his master. So poor McHarty was made to feel very much like a prisoner in his comfortable winter home and to long for the freedom of going and coming as he pleased.

Knighton's reason for withholding a knowledge of the air blast was that he was bleaching a second buffalo skin, much more carefully than he had the one stolen by the Sioux, and he had not acquired enough confidence in his companion to share with him the great secret that white buffaloes could be made to order. So, though he frequently walked into the gorge on moonlit nights to examine the workings of his "bleachery," he did not mention the fact to the other occupant of Sod Castle. On one of these occasions, as he returned to the valley, he found McHarty awaiting him at the end of the gorge.

"Praise be to the saints!" cried the honest fellow, half-laughing and half-sobbing, "I thought ye was dead and that I was shut up in this place for the rest

of me life. But how did ye do it, sir? I thought no man could walk that path except he was kilt."

"That's my secret," laughed Knighton. Then, noticing a hurt expression on the other's face, he added, "I am considerably taller than you, you know."

"Yes, sir, but you're not seven fate. However, if yez don't care to be telling how the trick's done, I'll not be bothering ye about it."

Some six weeks after this incident, which Knighton had entirely forgotten, and long after the buffalo skin had been successfully bleached, cured with alum, and put away for future use, he again found occasion to leave the valley on one of his chemical trips. This time he went out on horseback, telling McHarty he should be back before dark. Late that afternoon, as he rode back, rejoicing in the first breath of spring, which had come at last, he was startled by what he at first took to be a human figure standing directly in the entrance to the gorge. A closer examination, conducted very cautiously, disclosed the object to be a sort of a scarecrow, braced by sticks, and holding outstretched a strip of white-tanned buckskin on which was printed, in crude, charcoal characters,

"COMPLIMENTS BLUE McHARTY."

For a moment Knighton stared incredulous. How was the thing possible? Not a breath of air was stirring in the gorge; the blanket of deadly gases was at

least five feet thick, while the little Irishman wasn't much more than five feet tall. And yet here was irrefutable evidence that he had been out. Where was he now? Had he gone back as he came, or had he left the valley for good, never to return?

Asking himself these questions with a heavy heart and with a knowledge that without his cheery companion he could not bear the terrible loneliness of the valley, Knighton rode on through the gorge, Don Felix holding his head high and giving his usual signs of uneasiness as they went.

“Oh, say, Paddy, dear, and did ye hear
The news that's going round?”

sung with a quaint quaver, seemed to lift a load from Arnold Knighton's shoulders as he entered the valley. Although it did not solve the riddle of the scarecrow, it was proof sufficient that he had not been deserted.

“Blue McHarty, I never was more glad to see anyone in my life!” he cried as he entered the warmth and cheer of Sod Castle, where his companion was busily preparing a meal.

“The same to you, sir.”

“But how did you do it? I mean, how did you ever go through that gorge and back again without a horse to carry you?”

“That's my saycret, sir,” replied the young Irishman with a wink and a comical leer. “Ye see, I'm a good bit shorter than yer honor.”

"The trick is yours," laughed Knighton. "You have turned the tables on me very neatly, and I will tell you my secret in exchange for yours."

"Done, sir," agreed the other promptly.

So Knighton explained about the nightly draught of air that cleared the gorge of its noxious vapors, while McHarty listened with eager interest.

"The iligant simplicity av it!" he cried, when the other had finished. "No trouble at all, and yet as tight as a goat, unless ye know the trick. It bates the Rocking Rock av the Dog Dens entirely!"

"Yes, it's all very simple when you know it," admitted Knighton. "But now tell me how you went out and came back in safety? Of course, anyone could do that at night; but how you, with your height and without a horse, managed it in the daytime is away beyond my comprehension."

"Perhaps, then, these'll aid yer honor's understanding," replied McHarty with a grin, at the same time stooping and pulling a pair of rudely constructed stilts from under his bunk.

"Stilts!" exclaimed Knighton.

"Nothing less," replied McHarty gravely.

"The idea is absolutely silly in its simplicity, and yet it never occurred to me. How did you happen to catch it?"

"Sure, ye might be thinking of many things that would never occur to the likes of me; while, by the

same token, I might now and then catch an idea that had given everyone else the slip. Me old father used to say that no two brains ever was built alike, and that what was one man's wisdom was another's folly."

"Right he was," laughed Knighton. "But I am afraid that your idea of stilts combines wisdom with folly. They will carry you through the gorge so long as you can keep your footing; but if you should fall, as you are more than likely to on that pathway of bones, you would never live to remount them."

"The very thing I was thinking all the way through, till I got so frightened that I barely took time to post me notice av location before I come back on a run."

"On a run?"

"Nothing less. And the danger av it was proved after I was safe in the valley, for I'd no sooner slowed to a walk when I got a tumble that bruk one of me stilts."

"Well!" said Knighton, shaking his head, as he realized how very nearly his companion had been lost to him. "I wouldn't try to mend it, for you won't have to use it again now that you know the secret of the air blast."

"True, yer honor, and a saycret av that kind is a fine thing to own in this country. Are you knowing to that one of the Dog Dens I was speaking of?"

"No. I was going to ask you about it. What do you mean by the Rocking Rock?"

"It's just a tale I heard from one of me partners in the fur business, and whether it's true or not I couldn't tell. Anyhow, he said he was the only man living that was knowing to it, and now he's entirely dead himself. It seems there is a place av some kind east of the Missouri called the Dog Dens."

"Yes, I know of it."

"Do you so? Then there's no need for me to be telling you anything more about it."

"Yes, yes; go on. I've never been there, and all I know is from hearsay."

"Then I'm knowing to as much as you, and maybe more, if ye never heard tell av the Rocking Rock."

"I never did."

"Well, then, there's a cave, so I'm told, that leads down to the center of the earth, and out av it come all the Injuns, or at laste a large part of them."

"Yes. I know of that cave."

"Ye do? Then ye know more than me after all, and I'll tell ye no more."

In vain did Knighton apologize for his interruption and beg his companion to complete his story of the Rocking Rock. The little Irishman was as obstinate as he was red-headed, and all he would say was:

"If ye know the cave, ye know the rock, for one leads to the other; and without knowing the one ye

can know nothing of the other. So, since there's no more to be said, I'll bid ye good evening, while I go out for a short bit of a stroll."

With this, McHarty snatched up his rifle and walked out into the night, while Arnold, provoked at the man's obstinacy, turned into his bunk and almost instantly fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XV

STEALING HORSES FROM HORSE THIEVES

So weary was Arnold Knighton that evening that he slept without waking until daylight. Then, as he lay for a moment getting his eyes open, he wondered at the stillness. Usually Blue McHarty was up before this time, getting breakfast and whistling or singing over his work. Now neither of these sounds was to be heard. Knighton sat up and stared about him. His companion's bunk was empty, and there was no fire on the hearth.

"Hello, Blue!" he shouted; but there was no answer.

Filled with misgivings, the man sprang up, went to the door and looked out. A light snow had fallen during the night, and it lay in unbroken whiteness. Not a footprint led away from the shack or to it. Then Knighton remembered that the young Irishman had started the previous evening for what he called "a bit of a stroll." As he was in the habit of doing this on pleasant nights just before turning in, the other had thought nothing of it. Now the recollection filled him with dismay.

“Blue has tried the passage of the gorge,” he said to himself, “to prove the truth of what I told him about the air blast, and something has kept him from coming back.”

A few minutes later Knighton was on Don Felix's back, clattering through the gorge, with the hope of finding his companion waiting at the farther end. But McHarty was not there, nor was there a trace of him; only the thin mantle of snow was spread unbroken in every direction.

Knighton rode a short distance beyond the gorge, and then pulled up. “It is pure folly to be hunting a limitless wilderness like this without the slightest idea of direction,” he reflected. “And he may be in the valley after all. Like as not he is back at the ranch getting breakfast by this time, and wondering what has become of me.”

With this he turned and rode back to Sod Castle, only to find it as empty as when he left. He got himself some breakfast, ate it in melancholy loneliness, and then set forth to search the valley; but without result. For a week, only pausing for needed rest and food, did Arnold Knighton maintain the hunt for his lost companion, and in all that time he found no sign. Then he gave it up and turned his attention to other matters.

Spring had come, and with it the time for travel. Life alone in the valley was no longer endurable, and,

also, the great object to which he had sworn to devote himself demanded his presence elsewhere. But before he could journey he must secure transportation for his effects. He needed horses, and he proposed to procure them by the aid of chemistry.

During his months of residence in the Land of Great Smoke, Knighton had become thoroughly familiar not only with its natural features, but with the many trails by which it was crossed in every direction. He had learned that one of these was much used by Blackfoot horse-stealing expeditions on their way to and from the country of the Crows, and near it he established a camp of observation.

For three days he waited in close hiding, and then his patience was rewarded. A distant dust-cloud finally disclosed a small party of warriors returning from a successful raid, riding leisurely and driving before them a number of stolen horses. When they had passed his hiding place, Knighton cautiously followed and watched them until they went into camp for the night. Then he made his own preparations.

Nearly all his chemical work during the past winter had been in the direction of producing inflammable combinations that would burn either with intense light or brilliant color. With an abundance of sulphur and saltpeter at hand, he also had found or compounded magnesium chloride, chlorate of potassium, strontium nitrate, and red orpiment. From these he had manu-

factured a small quantity of magnesium wire, and had produced the materials for both red and blue fire. Although thus well equipped for a Fourth of July celebration, our chemist had other and much more practical uses for the fireworks that he had prepared with such patient application, aided only by the crudest of apparatus.

On the night in question the Blackfoot warriors, having eaten a hearty meal, were sprawled in the darkness about a camp-fire big enough to light their pipes, but not emitting sufficient glow to direct the aim of an enemy's weapon. Their stolen horses were pastured under guard close at hand, and no night of their entire raid had promised greater peace than this one.

Suddenly the low-voiced conversation of the warriors was interrupted by a moaning sound, that rapidly grew into a piercing war cry. Ere it ceased, two points of light, one blue and the other red, appeared on a low hilltop at one side. These quickly expanded into brilliant flames, giving out great volumes of smoke that rolled away in tinted clouds.

By this time every warrior was on his feet, gazing in bewilderment at the spectacle. As the flames grew brighter they began to utter ejaculations of terror; for, gradually outlining before their astonished eyes, appeared a great figure, apparently towering to the sky. All at once it vanished in the smoke-cloud, to reappear a minute later rushing directly toward them on horse-

back, and surrounded by whirling flashes of dazzling light.

This was more than the Blackfeet could stand; and, yelling the name of "Wicasta" as they ran, they fled precipitately through the pall of blackness immediately succeeding the lightning-like flashes by which the dreaded spirit had been revealed. Above all other sounds they now heard the pounding of hoofs, swelling to a roll like thunder, and then gradually dying into a silence that was almost as terrible. During the remainder of the night there was no repetition of the mysterious sights or sounds, and with daylight the boldest among them ventured back with a faint hope of regaining their horses. Not one remained; but a broad trail led to the place of bones, and none dared attempt to follow it farther.

In the meantime Don Felix had borne his rider into the thick of the stolen herd, and through it; whereupon the frightened animals stampeded and followed the sound of his flying hoofs until it led them into the Valley of Mystery.

A few hours later, Arnold Knighton, working at his leisure, selected and roped six of the ponies thus corralled, and tethered them in the vicinity of Sod Castle. For several days he fed these and watered them, until they became accustomed to his presence; then, on the night selected for his departure, he turned two of them loose. The remaining four he loaded with the

packs of furs and other properties already prepared, made them fast one behind another, and heading, on Don Felix, the procession thus formed, he passed for the last time out over the white pathway of death that led to the world of life.

During the two months that followed, the wanderings of the outcast warrior led him over many a weary league of mountain, desert, and plain, amid dangers that taxed all his skill to escape, and hardships that tested his fortitude. His best bit of good fortune was the meeting with a couple of white trappers who had wintered in the mountains, and who, like himself, were bound out to dispose of their pelts. So well did he guard his secrets that these men, with all their keenness, never once suspected that he was without a scalp, or that, in one of his tightly wrapped packs, he carried anything so precious as a white buffalo skin. At the same time he learned but little of their history. The three traveled together for mutual protection, and cared for nothing further.

In this manner they finally came to Fort Laramie, a trading post of the American Fur Company, located on the north fork of the Platte, where Knighton sold his beaver skins for five hundred dollars. He did not receive this sum in money, but in form of an order on St. Louis, signed by the bourgeois or head trader of the post. Here also he exchanged two of his pack ponies for powder, ball, and provisions. From Fort

Laramie he traveled in company with a band of Ogalah Sioux, who at that time were friendly to the whites, as far as Pierre's Fort on the Missouri.

In all this mingling with both whites and Indians the wanderer had, by the wearing of a close-fitting fur cap, which he never removed from his head, concealed the fact that he was scalpleless. Neither had he betrayed any knowledge of the Aricarees, among whom he had dwelt for so long.

From Koda, his wife, he had gained many words of the Sioux language, and after winning the confidence of his Ogalah traveling companions by the exercise of his medical skill in their behalf, he began to make cautious inquiries concerning certain other of the plains tribes. Thus, finally he heard of the futile attempts of the Aricarees to render themselves strong in war by securing the skin of a white buffalo.

The Sioux laughed immoderately whenever this subject was mentioned, and were not inclined to discuss it; but at length, little by little, Knighton learned the story of Bear Tooth's treachery and its result. According to what he was told, that black-hearted medicine man had reappeared in the Aricaree village shortly after the return of Peninah's expedition, bringing with him a white buffalo skin that he claimed to have acquired through the strength of his magic in the region of the Dog Dens. When confronted with his own horse, captured by Peninah far to the westward

and near the Land of Great Smoke, Bear Tooth declared that the animal had been stolen from him by the Sioux. This story failed to allay Peninah's suspicions; and at the ceremony of presenting the white buffalo skin, which took place in the great Council Lodge, the young warrior watched the wily medicine man with relentless eyes.

At length the precious skin was produced and unrolled, when, to the consternation of Bear Tooth and the amazement of all others present, it was found to be absolutely hairless. The hair was there, and it was white, but it was detached from the hide, and when the latter was unfolded it fell to the ground in a loosely matted mass. Before Bear Tooth could utter a word in explanation, the son of Two Stars had sprung to his feet and pronounced this skin to be the very one procured in the Land of Great Smoke by the white medicine man who had accompanied him to that far-away region and who had foretold that its hair would drop out if it were handled by any person other than himself. Then he denounced Bear Tooth not only as a traitor to the Aricarees, but as the murderer of that white man who had become an Aricaree warrior, and demanded that he be punished.

"What was done to that false medicine man?" asked Knighton carelessly, after he had pieced together the bits that formed this story.

"It is not certainly known," was the reply. "By

some it is said that after losing both his eyes and his crooked tongue he was put to death; but others claim that he still lives as a squaw man and a slave of the Aricaree squaws, who have orders to beat him daily."

Besides this story, "the fur-cap man," as he was called by the Sioux, gathered from his new friends several other bits of interesting information. He was told the tale of the mighty spirit of the Great Smoke Land, whose name was "Wicasta." Also he learned of a scalp of long brown hair obtained in that dread region, and, for some reason unknown to them, considered so precious that it was kept in the great medicine lodge of the Dakotahs on the shore of Minnewakon, the sacred lake of salt waters.

Having talked of these things, as well as of many others, during the journey to Pierre's Fort on the Missouri, the white man, at that point, disappeared from the knowledge of his Ogalalah friends. They believed that he had boarded a steamer and gone down the river to the place of his own people; but in this they were wrong. He had boarded a steamer after dark, but only to obtain its captain's receipt for an American Fur Company's order, the amount of which was to be deposited in a St. Louis bank to the credit of Arnold Knighton. Then, without returning to land, the man caused himself and his horses to be set across the river, and from its farther bank he rode away alone to take the second step toward carrying out his great plan.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ROCKING ROCK OF THE DOG DENS

WHILE the Aricarees, together with their allies, the Mandans, dwelt on the west bank of the Missouri, its eastern bank and the intervening country to the distant Red River of the North was held by the Santee Sioux, most numerous and powerful of all the bands comprising the great Dakotah Nation. In their domain lay Minnewakon, afterward named by white men Devil's Lake; and their broad pasture lands, where fed countless thousands of buffalo, were bisected by a range of tall hills, grass-covered to their summits, and holding many mysteries. Chief among these was the detached group of rugged buttes, rent by chasms and honeycombed with caves, known as the Dog Dens.

According to legends, handed down from generation to generation around Aricaree camp-fires, or in the warm lodges on nights of storm and cold, the first Indians (Aricarees, of course), from whom all others are descended, came up from the interior of the earth and reached its surface through a mighty cavern of the Dog Dens. Through this exit, which no mortal had ever seen, came also the first buffalo, the first elk, and

the first of all other animals necessary to the life of man. When enough of these had issued forth, a pack of fierce ghost-dogs, whose growls and snarlings may sometimes be heard even to this day, were set to guard the cavern's mouth, that the upper world might not become too crowded. Also, while these ghostly guardians continue to bark, dwellers on the surface may not, during life, visit their kinsfolk of the under world, though after death their spirits find no difficulty in passing back and forth at will.

Many times and in various forms had Arnold Knighton heard this legend of the Dog Dens while dwelling among the Aricarees, from whom he now was outcast. Also he had planned to visit the region and make a study of its ghostly phenomena, but could not persuade an Indian to accompany him as guide. Even Peninah would not go, so deep-rooted was the superstition that warned all Aricarees from that vicinity.

During his search for a white buffalo, and amid the exciting events of his life in the Great Smoke Land, Knighton had not thought of the Dog Dens until so strangely reminded of them by Blue McHarty. Since then they often had been in his mind, and now he was on his way to explore their mysteries. As they lay about two hundred and fifty miles from Pierre's Fort, the journey occupied him nearly a week. Then he found himself in a region of high hills and deep-cut valleys, of lakes and streams, as different as can be

imagined from that of his recent abode, but quite as mysterious and fully as lonely as the place in which he had built Sod Castle.

Having thus reached the scene of his proposed explorations, Knighton made camp in a grove of spreading oaks at the bottom of a grassy, well-watered hollow, turned loose his horses, and set forth on foot to see what he could find. For days he wandered from butte to butte, from valley to valley; descending into dark canyons, climbing precipitous hillsides, ever searching, but never finding that which he sought. Apparently there was no cavern, and Blue McHarty's Rocking Rock was the veriest of myths. Each day only increased the keenness of his disappointment, until he knew not in which direction to turn. He was seeking a place in which an outcast warrior might make for himself a home that would be free from molestation, a place similar to the Valley of Mystery, but not so hopelessly remote. The Dog Dens had promised something of the kind, but now they seemed disinclined to redeem their promise.

One afternoon Knighton lay on a grassy slope gloomily regarding a steep opposite bank, at the foot of which flowed a small stream. For many minutes he remained so motionless that certain of the timid creatures who dwelt thereabouts, and who had hidden at his approach, began to resume their interrupted occupations. Little birds hopped fearlessly within his

reach, a slender green snake glided by without noticing him, and a striped gopher sat up and barked at him with shrill notes of defiance. Finally a fox, with a fat prairie hen flung across his back, trotted by within a stone's throw, and suddenly disappeared, as though possessed of the magic of invisibility.

The man rubbed his eyes and looked again. Then he rose, greatly to the consternation of his tiny neighbors, and walked in that direction. Crossing the shallow stream he came to a bit of overlapping bank holding a growth of bushes, behind which was a crevice. This was so narrow that one might hardly squeeze into it; but from it issued a current of cool air. Except for this last feature Knighton would have paid the crevice but slight attention. It would have seemed to him a fox's den and nothing more; but a current of air so cool and strong suggested an interior space that might be worth exploring. So he made a cautious entry on hands and knees, in which position he had not crawled more than a rod before he found that he could stand up, with room to spare. He shouted, and the echoes startled him with the distance of their reverberations. Could it be a cavern? The cavern for which he was seeking? If so, McHarty's story of a Rocking Rock at its entrance must indeed have been a bit of pure imagination.

Much as Knighton desired to explore this subterranean mystery, upon which he had so accidentally

stumbled, he dared not go beyond the circle of dim light filtering through the narrow entrance. So he beat a retreat while the way lay plain and returned to his camp.

The following morning saw him again at "Fox Gate," as he called the cavern entrance, well provided with means for continuing his explorations. He had candles, magnesium wire, matches, a packet of cooked meat, and, above all, a small compass. Also he had brought with him pencil and paper. Thus equipped, he boldly entered the narrow passage and began a series of underground wanderings that were continued for hours. The distance in a direct line covered during this time was not very great, probably not over a quarter of a mile, but every foot of it was explored with the utmost thoroughness, the angle of each turn was noted, and every distance was paced. In this way a large number of chambers, with their connecting passages, were visited, numbered, and described. Many others were noted as existing, but were allowed to remain unexplored for the present.

Knighton quickly found that while some of the passages sloped downward, others led up; and it was these latter that he made a point of following. When he was beginning to think that he had done enough for one day and ought to be turning back, it suddenly occurred to him that the atmosphere of the last chamber he had entered was decidedly warmer than that of any

others. This would seem to indicate the vicinity of another outlet to sun-warmed air. So he kept on a few steps farther, and presently caught a gleam of daylight. In another minute he had emerged into the full glow of an afternoon sun, in which he stood for a space, blinking like an owl.

As his eyes grew accustomed to the glare so that he might study his surroundings, he noted that directly before him, and cutting off his view, rose a gigantic boulder, or rather a great mass of rock. It seemed to fill at that point a narrow canyon of precipitous sides, by which, but for it, he would be barred from further advance. The top surface of the rock sloped sharply upward from him, and to gain a view of what lay beyond he began to ascend toward its farther edge. As he approached this he was dismayed to see that it failed to reach, by some twenty feet, the opposite side of the canyon, which also was lower by about the same distance.

Knighton stepped to the very edge to look down, when, to his consternation, the whole mass on which he was standing began to move with a harsh, grating sound, that he instantly connected with the snarlings of the legendary ghost-dogs. Overcome by terror, and believing the whole mountainside to be sliding, the man instinctively flung himself backward, though without hope of escape. At the same moment there came a slight jar, and with it the alarming motion ceased.

For a full minute he lay where he had fallen, expecting it to be resumed. Then, as nothing further happened, he cautiously regained his feet and looked about him. The angle of slope had so changed that he now stood on the lower instead of the upper edge of the rocky plane, and no longer was there an open space between him and the farther side of the canyon. It had been bridged, and he was free to pass on. Stepping from the rock, he walked a few paces and then looked back. All was quiet; the great rock appeared as fixed in its place as the everlasting hills, but it again sloped upward from him, so that he could not see what lay beyond. The mouth of the cavern from which he had emerged was hidden as though it never had existed.

“I wonder if it has been filled up and obliterated?” he mentally questioned. “I never heard of so gentle a landslide; but its effects may have been far-reaching. I suppose I might as well find out what has happened now as later.”

Thus thinking he returned to the rocky slope, and stepping as lightly as possible, so as not to disturb existing conditions, he advanced to its upper edge. Cautiously peering over, he saw below him a black space, beyond which showed the dark opening of the cavern. He caught but a glimpse, for, even as he bent forward to look, the grinding sound of a few minutes before was repeated, and once more he felt the great rock in motion beneath him. Again he hastily flung himself backward,

and again came the jar that announced the cessation of movement. Springing to his feet, he found himself at the cavern's mouth, with the rock sloping up behind him, as when he had first seen it.

At length it flashed into his mind that he was standing upon the identical Rocking Rock of which Blue McHarty had heard the story that he attempted to narrate to his friend. The young Irishman had said:

“If ye know the cave, ye know the rock, for one leads to the other; and without knowing the one, ye can know nothing of the other.”

That was exactly the present situation, except that, whoever told McHarty the story of the cavern evidently had known nothing of the Fox Gate.

Overjoyed by his discovery, our explorer tested the qualities of this unique drawbridge by walking to the opposite edge of the rock and back again several times. In each case the giant boulder, undoubtedly dropped into its peculiar position by some mighty glacier of a prehistoric age, tilted with his weight like a delicately balanced see-saw, and each movement was accompanied by the same sound of grinding that had so alarmed him at first.

At length he had found what he wanted, a dwelling-place secure from all ordinary forms of intrusion, since no Indian acquainted with the legends of the region dared approach it, and, according to Blue McHarty, only one white man up to this time had discovered its

secret. It was possible, too, that he might make the entrance even more secure by devising some means to control the motion of the rock after he had stepped from it, so that at all times it should present a barrier impassable except by himself. In the mean time his first effort must be to render the place habitable, while his second and greatest undertaking would be to provide it with inmates that should banish its loneliness.

CHAPTER XVII

STORM-SWEPT AND HOPELESS

THE SIOUX medicine men who guarded the skin of the white buffalo, which, brought from the Land of Great Smoke, was kept in the Council Lodge at Minnewakon, were greatly troubled. The magic skin had conferred strength and prosperity upon the tribe; their war parties were everywhere successful and their horse-stealing expeditions had increased the tribal wealth beyond computation. They were lords of the northern plains, and none might withstand them. Only two great things remained to be undertaken. On the east, the whites, who had crossed the Mississippi, were sweeping westward to the Red River of the North, taking possession of the Sioux lands, destroying their forests, killing off their game, and threatening their very existence as a people. On the west, also, the ever-present whites, creeping up the Missouri and establishing forts at commanding points, had formed friendly relations with those bitter enemies of the Dakotah, the Aricarees. The white chiefs were enlisting Aricaree warriors as scouts, runners, and horse-guards, and also were they providing them with rifles and ammunition. Thus had

the hands of the Aricarees been so strengthened that the Sioux had not yet succeeded in wiping out this tribe of tall fighters who always had defied them, though, since coming into possession of a white buffalo skin, the Sioux had dealt the tribe of Two Stars many telling blows. By the further aid of this all-powerful talisman the former still hoped to check the advance of the whites, as well as to exterminate the hated Aricarees; and only the medicine men having it in charge knew that its virtue was failing.

From the very first these had noted the dropping out of its white hairs, which, with each succeeding day, fell more and more rapidly, until at length the skin showed great patches of bare hide, and promised, within a few months, to become entirely hairless. When that happened, its magic would have departed, and its "medicine" would no longer strengthen the arms of those warriors who depended upon it to bring them victory. Before this should become known, and before the confidence of the nation should be shaken, was the time to strike two decisive blows—one against the ever-encroaching whites on the east, and the other against the still defiant Aricarees on the west. It had become known to the Sioux that a great war was raging among the palefaces, and they believed that, on account of it, both the white settlers of western Minnesota as well as the Aricarees, would be at their mercy.

Thus it happened that the close of a day in early

autumn, some fifteen months from the date on which Peninah's first unsuccessful expedition to the Great Smoke Land had returned, found the Aricaree village of Chief Two Stars in a state of pitiable confusion and great alarm. For six hours its warriors had been fighting against overwhelming numbers of Sioux on the plains beyond the bluffs. From coulee to coulee they had battled, ever losing ground, and ever driven backward.

Although the Aricarees fought well, it was without enthusiasm. They knew that their enemies were possessed of a magic talisman that was strongest in time of war; while all their own efforts to obtain one like it had only resulted in failure. How, then, could they hope to succeed when it was only too evident that the Great Spirit was not on their side? Thus, while the Sioux fought with the courage and dash inspired by the conviction of ultimate success, the Aricarees resisted with the doggedness of despair without hope. So they were driven back slowly but steadily, until the coming of night found them in full retreat down the slope of the bluffs whose crown was already occupied by the exultant Sioux. With the advent of another day these last would follow up their victory and wipe out every remnant of the miserable village that had for so long defied them. Now they would rest and feast in anticipation of the bloody triumph that was within their grasp.

The Aricaree village, on the other hand, was a scene of confusion and despair. The exhausted warriors ate in sullen silence of the food prepared by their squaws, and repaired their broken weapons. Some molded bullets, others bathed their wounds in the river, while here and there one sat dumbly, holding in his arms a favorite child. In the Council Lodge a little circle of chief men silently smoked without looking into one another's faces. There was nothing to be said, nothing to be done, but on the morrow to yield up their lives as dearly as possible. The victorious Sioux had them hemmed in on the north, the south, and the west. On the east was the great river, beyond which lay the country of their enemies. For a long time no white soldiers had come up the Missouri; they were too busy fighting among themselves to help the poor Aricarees or even to think of them. So the hearts of the wise men were as dark with sorrow as the night itself, and it was so black that no star was to be seen.

All the village, therefore, was nerving itself to meet death, and of its many inmates only two were meditating flight. One of these was Koda, who had been the wife of Wicasta, but who, now that he was dead, was unhappily married to an Aricaree warrior who ill-treated her and compelled her to work beyond her strength. The other was Bear Tooth, who had indeed been degraded to the pitiful position of a squaw-man, with the tips of his ears clipped off. On the day just

ended it had been Koda's turn to keep him at his menial tasks and to beat him. This last she had done gladly, and with her utmost strength, as she reflected that through him had come all her present sorrows, as well as a large share of the misfortunes now overtaking the village. As a result, Bear Tooth hated his task-mistress that night more than he did any other living person.

Koda was planning to escape and throw herself upon the mercy of the triumphant Sioux because they were her own people. There was no reason why she should stay and share the fate of the Aricarees, who had despised and abused her since the loss of her first husband. Bear Tooth was planning to flee to the Sioux not only because he, too, could claim kinship with them, but because his limit of endurance had been reached. Only before he left he wanted in some way to wreak vengeance on the woman who, that day, had caused him to suffer as never before since the hour of his disgrace. So he prowled about the lodge in which she dwelt, seeking an opportunity to do her harm.

While the Aricaree village thus lay under a double pall of blackness, one mental and the other physical, the latter suddenly was rent by a flash of intensely vivid lightning, instantly followed by an appalling crash of thunder. At the same time came a rush of wind that howled and shrieked among the lodges, but there was no rain. For an hour did the electrical wind-storm blaze, roar, and screech above the cowering village,

whose trembling inhabitants believed that it foretold the extinction of their tribe.

In Koda's lodge the little Hanana, greatly frightened, clung to her mother's skirts and screamed with terror. In vain did the woman try to quiet her, in vain did the sullen warrior who had become her stepfather, order her to be silent. Finally, he grew so enraged against the child that he tore her from her mother's arms and flung her from the lodge, exclaiming as he did so:

"Go to your bugaboo father, then! This is his weather."

The woman attempted to spring after the child, but the man held her for a full minute before letting her go. Then she rushed outside, but could distinguish nothing in the blackness. In vain did she call, darting hither and thither, by the fitful gleams of the lightning, but her child was gone leaving no trace. Into lodge after lodge ran the distracted mother; but none could tell her of her lost one, until at length she came to an old crone who dwelt by herself on the edge of the village. To the mother's inquiries this one made harsh answer:

"I may have seen your child, and I may not. By the light of the sky-fire I saw the cut-eared squaw-man running with a child in his arms. Whither he went I know not, but his trail leads in the direction of our enemies."

This clew was a faint one, but there was no other and Koda followed it, appearing with dawn in the Sioux camp, demanding her child. She was dressed as an Aricaree woman, and they would have killed her, but, boldly facing them, she made the sign of the Dakotah and claimed blood-kinship. So they held their hands and set her to work with their own women, but of her child they could tell her nothing. No man, crop-eared, or otherwise, had passed their lines that night, and, as she could see for herself, there was no child among them.

Finding this to be the case, Koda would have returned to the Aricarees to make further search in the village, but this the Sioux would not allow for fear she should tell their enemies of the loss they themselves had sustained during that night of storm. By it their strength was so shorn that even as she came among them, they were meditating a retreat instead of the triumphant advance and easy victory they had planned for that day.

In the mean time the little Hanana, flung forth into the storm, had been snatched up by Bear Tooth prowling about the lodge of the person he most wished to injure. With a suppressed cry of exultation he clasped the child tightly and ran with her in the direction of the Sioux encampment on the bluffs. He was filled with evil triumph, for not only was he dealing a deadly blow to the woman he hated, but he had cap-

tured a prize that would insure him a welcome among the Dakotah. So the crop-eared squaw-man chuckled to himself as ran in a wide circuit from the village and paid little heed to the voice of the child whom he carried.

Another man, however, heard the sound and listened with straining ears to the childish cries uttered in a tongue but little used among the Aricarees.

“Mamma! mamma! Papa! papa!” screamed the little one.

The one person who listened and comprehended, stood beside the log cabin formerly occupied by the white medicine man as a laboratory. Reaching it sometime after dark he had been busily engaged inside, until attracted by the cries of Hanana. Then he sprang to the open, wild with excitement.

Bear Tooth's circuitous course led him close to the ruinous hut which, standing above and beyond the village, was the last of all its structures. After passing it there would be no further danger of his flight being interrupted. Already he was breathing more freely and beginning to slacken his pace. Suddenly he was brought to a halt as abruptly as though he had run against a wall of rock, for a flash of lightning had revealed, standing directly in his path, a great figure having the terrible features of one whom he knew to be dead.

Almost with the first gleam of the next morning's light, the crop-eared traitor, who once was Bear Tooth,

medicine man, was found lying dead with a broken neck, on the very spot where he had been halted by that dread apparition. Those who found him looked at one another with fear and trembling, for during the storm of the night before they, together with all the village, had heard, thrice repeated, the war cry of Wicasta, and here, close at hand, stood the medicine lodge that in life had been his.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WAR CRY OF WICASTA

WHEN the war cry of Wicasta, thrice repeated, sounded above the rush of winds, on the night that many of the Aricarees believed to be their last on earth, the storm was at its height, and the one seemed a fitting complement of the other. Although none dared venture forth, many eyes turned instinctively in the direction of the dead man's medicine lodge, and these were rewarded by a sight as startling as had been the sound of the war cry. The little cabin, standing by itself on a slight eminence, was ablaze with light and seemed to be on fire. Flames of many colors surrounded it and great clouds of smoke were whirled about it by the fierce winds. On the side of the structure toward the village, which was open, glowed a light of marvelous brightness, and behind this shone a patch of dazzling white. What this was none could imagine, but the effect of the whole was to arouse fear, stimulate curiosity, and so excite superstition that the bravest man in the village would rather have died than go near the haunted cabin that night. The fire display lasted only a few minutes, and then all was black as before, but none

among the Aricarees dared sleep, and never was dawn more anxiously awaited.

In the morning, as soon as it was light enough to distinguish the outlines of the log cabin, half a dozen of the bravest warriors, led by Peninah, advanced cautiously in that direction. Their first find was the dead body of Bear Tooth, though of the little Hanana there was no sign. After a few minutes spent in examination of this grewsome object, they again moved slowly toward the cabin. That it should be standing, unharmed by the flames they had seen envelope it, gave ample cause for astonishment, but one infinitely greater awaited them. It was not revealed until they had reached the structure and were timidly peering into its black interior. Then one after another gave vent to ejaculations of incredulous amazement, for, suspended from the ceiling of the single room, and stretched to such length that it occupied the entire opposite wall space, was as perfect a buffalo skin as any of them ever had seen. Also it was of an even whiteness without blemish or discoloration. For a space the warriors gazed in awe-stricken silence. Then spoke Peninah, in a voice that at first was little louder than a whisper:

“It is a gift from Wicasta,” he said. “From his place in the Spirit Land he came again to his adopted people to bring them a trophy of his hunting and to proclaim his anger against Bear Tooth the traitor. As all may see, this is the skin of no earthly buffalo, for

on earth was never one so perfect or so white. That Wicasta himself came we know, for did we not hear his voice. With him, and in his honor, came also the thunder god, the god of fire, and the god of mighty winds. To this lodge, built by Wicasta when he was a man, they came, and breathed upon it with breathings of colored flame that he might have light to place his gift. Red was the breath of the thunder god; blue marked the presence of the god of winds; white, the brightest light of all, so dazzling to our eyes that we hardly could look, was the breath of the fire god, who is most powerful. Now are the Aricarees favored above all other tribes and made so strong that none may withstand them. Only with the pale faces must we always maintain friendship, since through a white man has this great gift come to us. Also from this place, where Wicasta himself left it, must his gift never be removed. Here will we build a great medicine lodge inclosing the little lodge that was his. In it, for all time, shall be kept the skin of the white buffalo brought to us by Wicasta from the happy hunting grounds. Are the words of Peninah pleasing to his brothers?"

"The words of Peninah are so good that what he says shall be done," they answered, and then all hastened back to the waiting village to proclaim the great news.

Presently from every Aricaree lodge there arose such sounds of jubilation, such beating of drums and joyful

shoutings as filled with dismay the hearts of the Sioux who listened on the bluffs. Already were they greatly troubled on account of the strange happenings of the night. To begin with, during the storm a thunderbolt had killed two of their number and injured others. Then, even as they looked fearfully down on the fires of many colors blazing in the Aricaree village, there had come a whirlwind of galloping hoofs through their camp and in a minute half their horses were gone. Now, still looking down, they saw a swarm of Aricaree warriors, splendidly mounted, brave in paint and the flaunting feathers of the great war eagle, ride tumultuously forth from the village as though confident of sweeping all before them, and at the sight the heretofore stout-hearted Sioux lost courage. Something had weakened their medicine, and it was the part of wisdom to retreat while they might, rather than stay to be wiped out.

This was not a decision, but a common impulse, and, obeying it, the entire Sioux war party was streaming across the plain in disorderly flight before the Aricarees were clear of their own village.

Some of the flying Sioux were overtaken and struck down, but most of them made good their escape, and with these went Koda. The retreat was continued as far south as Heart River, where the fugitives found another demoralized throng of their own people—men, women, and children—who had been driven west of the

Missouri by Colonel Sibley and his men from Minnesota, whom the Sioux had defied and challenged to mortal combat. Now the latter knew that the strength of their medicine had indeed departed, and that for the present, at least, their fighting ardor must be restrained.

So for a time there was peace on the red frontier, and one of those most instrumental in bringing it about was the father of Hanana, who once had been scalped by the Sioux and left for dead in the Land of Great Smoke. When, in this condition, he had awakened from a dream of his little daughter, during which she had clung to him and stroked his face with soft baby hands, he had determined for her sake to live. Then he had planned a home for her in which she should cheer his loneliness. He would find her and take her to it, and thereafter his life should be devoted to her comfort and happiness. The education that was his should be hers also; for her sake he would seek wealth, and sometime he would carry her back to the land of those social opportunities that he had thrown away. This was the great plan that, in the face of death, had inspired him with the determination to live, and to whose perfection he had bent his reviving energies.

At first he had thought of bringing his little daughter to dwell with him in the Valley of Mystery, but after a few months spent there he realized that, safe and comfortable as it was, it also was too lonely and too remote

from the source of such supplies as he should need. Then a chance remark made by Blue McHarty had turned his thoughts in a new direction, toward a place within reach of the resources of civilization, which at the same time promised equal safety with his Valley of Mystery.

He had set forth to find this place, and in face of many difficulties he had at length succeeded. Then he had spent the remainder of the summer in preparing "Castle Cave," as he called this new refuge, for the reception of inmates, for he hoped to bring Koda to it as well as Hanana. He made a trip to Fort Berthold, beyond the great bend of the Missouri, where he procured certain things he needed from the post trader, and arranged to have others sent up to that point from St. Louis. Also he devoted much time to the interior arrangement of the series of caverns that he proposed to convert into a residence. He enlarged some of the connecting passages and closed others. At several points he discovered thin places in the rocky walls where he could cut openings to serve as windows and for better ventilation. He found a crevice that would serve as a chimney, constructed a fireplace beneath it, and collected a large store of dry wood.

In all this time he tried to plan for an undetected visit to the Aricaree village, from which he was only about fifty miles distant, and the bringing away of Hanana. Also he would bring Koda if she would

come, though he doubted if her training would permit her to accept as a husband one legally dead and without any rights that an Indian was bound to respect.

While still undecided as to what he should do in this direction, Knighton ran across the trail of a large Sioux war party one evening as he was returning from a hunt, well beyond the limits of the Dog Dens, and followed it to a place where the Indians were halted until the moon should rise. Here he succeeded in creeping close enough to a circle of warriors to hear scraps of their conversation. It needed but a few words to enlighten him as to their destination, which he thus discovered to be the Aricaree village of Chief Two Stars.

Without waiting longer he slipped away and hastened back to Castle Cave where he made up a pack of the few things that he deemed necessary, and by dawn he had started for the Missouri. The Sioux were so far ahead of him that by the time he had crossed the river and gained a place of concealment about a mile from the village, fighting between them and the Aricarees had been in progress for half a day.

Under cover of darkness Knighton made his way among the gathered lodges, and by listening to the conversation of excited groups soon learned all that he wanted to know. The Aricarees were badly demoralized and apprehensive of what might happen on the morrow, since their enemies were possessed of the



Leading them on a furious charge.

powerful medicine of a white buffalo skin, which they themselves had been unable to secure.

The outcast crept through the darkness to the lodge that once had been his, and from its interior there came voices that he recognized as belonging to his wife and little daughter. Also there came the voice of a man whom he discovered to have taken his place as husband and father. At the same time the sounds did not indicate that this warrior held either his wife or step-daughter in very high esteem.

A storm was imminent, and Knighton, sneaking like an enemy's spy among those whom he held as friends, determined to make the effort to recover Hanana under cover of its turmoil. Also he proposed to produce an effect that should attract general attention in a certain direction and so give him the chance of working in another.

An hour later, amid the howlings of a tempest that had broken more quickly than he expected, and with his preparations for a spectacle still incomplete, he suddenly heard a cry that thrilled him as could no other on earth. It was the voice of his own child calling upon him for help and he was quick to respond.

The situation was revealed by a flash of lightning, and instantly recognizing his bitterest enemy, the man felled him with a blow, even as he snatched away the struggling child. Then he ran back to the hut, hastily completed his preparations, lighted two fuses, and filled

with exultation at the marvelous good fortune attending him, he uttered thrice the thrilling war cry that he believed would still be remembered as his in that Aricaree village.

Even while it mingled with the screech of the storm, he had departed with that which was dearest to him of all the world, his own little daughter, clasped tightly in his powerful arms. Quickly they ran to the place where Don Felix impatiently awaited them, and a few minutes later he was leading them on a furious charge through the herd of Sioux ponies beyond the bluffs.

CHAPTER XIX

ZEPH'INE AND FAMILY

ABOUT the time that the discomfited Sioux, who had been scared away from the Aricaree village, were exchanging condolences on the Heart River with their fellow tribesmen, a quaint little procession was slowly making its way eastward from Fort Berthold, one hundred miles farther north. It was led by a large man clad in buckskin, wearing a fur cap, and riding a superb black stallion. These, of course, were Arnold Knighton and Don Felix. Sometimes the former bore in his arms a small bit of femininity having brown hair, red cheeks, and merry blue eyes that contracted to merest slits with laughter, but which could open wide enough with sober astonishment. Hanana was dressed in a little frock, leggins and moccasins of softest fawn skin, whitened with pipe clay and stained in bright colors. About her neck was a collar of beads, and the braids of her hair were tied with bits of scarlet ribbon.

The child was as full of energy as a steel spring, and even in her father's arms was the epitome of perpetual motion. Now she was patting his cheeks, pulling his beard, lifting her own face to be kissed, or simply

jumping up and down in an exuberance of spirits. Then she would devote her whole attention to Don Felix, reaching down to pluck at his glossy mane, snatching at the bridle rein, or kicking him with her little moccasined feet to increase his speed, while always she chattered in a curious mixture of Sioux, Aricaree, and English words, uttering shrill little cries of overflowing joy and bubbling with laughter.

Already she seemed to have forgotten the past and to be completely reconciled with the present. She was not quite three years old, and so her affections were not yet very deeply rooted. This new papa with blue eyes like her own, who always smiled at her and never struck her, and allowed her to do exactly as she pleased, was infinitely preferable to the one she was forgetting as fast as possible. As for the mother who had so mysteriously gone out of her life, was she not already replaced by Zeph'ine who was much fatter and more comfortable, and jollier, and altogether more desirable? Besides, Zeph'ine always rode in the cart with those delightful puppies, and Hanana could go to her any moment she chose. She had found that out. All she had to do, when riding with the big man who answered to the name of "papa," was to pretend weariness or thrust out her under lip with a whimper, and, presto! the change was made. Almost instantly she would find herself cuddling down in Zeph'ine's broad lap, perhaps with the puppies scrambling over her, with her head pillowed

against Zeph'ine's warm bosom. Then the latter would croon some quaint Breton melody, while the ungreased wooden wheels of the cart turning on ungreased wooden axles shrieked what to Hanana's untutored ear sounded a most melodious accompaniment. In a minute she was sound asleep, and until she woke again the little procession would jog along without interruption. For that was all there was to it, the big man on Don Felix, and the covered Red River cart holding Hanana, Zeph'ine, the puppies, with their mother, and ever so many other things. It was drawn by Babette, a very small mule, at whose head generally walked Simon Lefevre husband of Zepherine.

Also Simon was owner of the cart, which he had built, and of Babette, whom he had stolen from an emigrant train; but that was a long time ago and nobody remembered it now. Besides, the emigrants thought he was an Indian, and so he was—half Indian, half French-Canadian, a combination that, according to his own code of morals, gave him the right to steal horses or mules from both sides whenever the opportunity offered.

Simon and Zepherine, who was not a "breed" at all but of pure French-Canadian blood from the Province of Quebec, lived at Pembina, where they owned, or rather claimed, a piece of land that they called a farm, but Simon was so much more a hunter and trapper than he was a farmer, that he never could find time to work

his land. Nor did they have a house, for what need had they of one so long as they owned a cart, with Babette to pull it here and there all over the world? In the early summer of that year they had gone on a buffalo hunt that finally brought them to Fort Berthold where they disposed of a cart load of skins. While they lingered at the post a steamboat came down the river bound for St. Louis, and instantly Zepherine declared her intention of taking a wedding trip to that city of her dreams.

“*Mais Zeph'ine!*” exclaimed the astonished Simon, “already have you been *dix ans une mariée.*”

“*N'importe,*” answered Zepherine. “It is that I have not had him, so now I will take him.”

“*Mais moi!* I do not care for the treep of the *nouveau mariée.*”

“Piff! you is not invite. With myself will I go on the *bon voyage.*”

So Zepherine went on that very steamboat as stewardess, while Simon remained behind employed as one of the hunters of the post for the summer.

In the autumn, when Zepherine returned from the great trip of her life, she had not only spent for finery in the wonderful city all the money she had earned, but she was in debt to the steamer nearly twenty dollars—a debt she had sworn should be paid by her husband at Fort Berthold.

But Simon also was in trouble. In the absence of

all restraint the summer had been for him a season of eating, drinking, and much merriment, which latter included the playing of a fascinating game of cards taught him by the soldiers. It had promised to make his fortune, but the mere learning of it had cost him all his wages, and everything he owned, including Babette and the cart, except Pamint, his dog, and her litter of pups, that no one would have. He had been allowed to retain the use of Babette and the cart upon promising to pay the claim against them out of Zepherine's wages as soon as her steamboat came back up the river.

Alas! when it arrived it brought only despair. He could not pay Zepherine's bills and she could not pay what he owed. The man who claimed Babette and the cart was on hand to take them away, while the steamboat captain declared that until Madame Lefevre had worked out her indebtedness she should not be allowed to leave the boat. This meant that she must at least travel as far as distant Fort Benton and back again—a journey that she knew abounded with the most frightful dangers. In vain did the distracted woman weep and expostulate. She even offered to turn over to the hard-hearted captain her entire collection of beautiful pinchbeck jewelry acquired in St. Louis, except, of course, her St. Simon earrings of solid brass, the necklace of gilt saints, certain brass combs surmounted by little tinkling bells, and the rings that already were

on her fingers. The captain politely refused to deprive her of her ornaments, and insisted on having his money or her services.

In vain did Simon stamp his feet and tear his hair in fury, at the same time swearing many strange half-breed oaths. He even offered Pamint, with all her puppies, in exchange for his wife, but "*le Capitaine de navire sans cœur*" declined the offer. Then, in a fury of despair, Simon plucked forth a knife and the captain met it with a leveled pistol. The affair had reached a serious crisis, and it was high time for the amused spectators to interfere. One of them, a big man wearing a fur cap, did so, stepping forward with a proposition that would at once settle all difficulties. He wanted a first-class trapper to work for him during the coming winter, also he wanted a woman to look after his little motherless girl. Furthermore, he was in need of a cart and mule to transport to his place of residence on the road to Pembina certain articles of freight that had just come to him by that very steamboat. If Simon and his wife chose to engage themselves to him for the winter he immediately would settle madame's little bill on the steamboat, reclaim the cart and Babette, and allow the Lefevres to work out the indebtedness thus incurred at a liberal rate of wage, with board and lodging thrown in. Did such a plan meet with their approval?

"Monsieur, certainly thou art of the blessed

saints!" cried Zepherine, who, in the fullness of her gratitude, would have flung her arms about the deliverer's neck, had he not stepped hastily back. "Without doubt will we accept thy most generous offer, me and my man. As for *la pauvre 'tite* of no mother, there is nothing in all the world so dear to me. Silence, Simon! Already have you made trouble enough. Now it is I, *moi même*, who will extricate thee from thy stupid difficulties."

So it came about that on the following morning the little procession, already described, set forth from Fort Berthold and wound its slow way eastward over the trackless plains. Two days later it reached the grass-covered hills of the Coteau du Missouri, and after a rest on the shore of Strawberry Lake, it turned in the direction of certain rugged buttes.

"Is not this the den of the dog, *Maison au Chien?*" asked Simon.

"Yes," replied Knighton, "and also it is where I make my home."

"*Sacrebleu*, Monsieur! But it is a place terrible, of evil reputation and great danger. Surely one may not think of dwelling here!"

"That's where you are mistaken, for I think of it. I have dwelt here in the past and intend doing so in the future. But what is the matter? Surely a brave man like you is not going to be frightened away by idle tales of superstition."

“No, Monsieur, not me. I am a brave man, but for the sake of my family, my Zeph’ine, whom also I must consider.”

“Have I not a family as well? Do you think I would bring my daughter into a place of danger?”

“But she is very little, Monsieur. Of my Zeph’ine there is much more to be considered.”

“Hola Simon!” called a voice from the cart, which had stopped during this controversy, “what for you mek so great talk?”

With a few words from Hanana’s father and many from Lefevre, the trouble was explained and judgment promptly was rendered.

“*Bête! Poltron! Cochon!*” cried Zepherine, addressing these fond terms to her husband. “Do you think I shall stop here all night for your foolishness? *L’avancer! Marchon, quick!*” and without another word the half-breed moved on.

If he had given in here, however, he was stubbornly determined not to do so when the destination of the little party finally was reached, and, to his horror, he discovered his employer’s place of abode to be a cavern. Doubtless it was the very one leading to the center of the earth and guarded by spirits of the under world, concerning which he had heard frightful tales from his Indian friends.

“No, Monsieur,” he said decisively, “I will not enter by so much as one of my feet *cette caverne*. Always

have I dwelt on the top of the world, and so I shall while I am live. After, maybe, who can tell? But now, no."

Even Zepherine's confidence in Hanana's father was shaken when he proved to be a cave dweller, and she declared in favor of her husband's position. Monsieur might go into his *caverne* if he chose. Even he had the power to take with him *la 'tite ange*, his child, though against this she would never cease to protest; but she herself would not, for one moment, be buried in the ground while she breathed. Nor should Simon, her husband, Babette, her mule, Pamint, her dog, to say nothing of the puppies, even look into so dreadful a place.

In vain did Arnold Knighton dilate upon the safety, the warmth, and the abounding comforts of his cavern. In vain did he hint at the obligations his companions had assumed in entering his employ. Zepherine was inflexible in her determination. They would stay with him, though his chosen place of residence was by no means what it should be, and work out their pecuniary indebtedness according to agreement. While doing this they could very well live in their cart, but they had not agreed to become cave dwellers and they would not.

During this discussion Simon smoked his pipe in moody silence. Not that he did not have plenty to say, but his wife sternly ordered him to close his mouth

every time he opened it, and he had long ago learned the wisdom of obedience.

So the little community of the Dog Dens was divided into two households. Arnold Knighton, the little Hanana, Don Felix, and one of the puppies that had been presented to the child before they left Fort Berthold, occupying Castle Cave, and the Lefevres, with Babette, Pamint, and the remaining puppies living in a log hut that had been erected for them on the very hillside from which Knighton had made his first discovery of Fox Gate. Much as he regretted this division it had one redeeming feature. This was that he had not been obliged to divulge the secret of the Rocking Rock.

CHAPTER XX

A GLIMPSE OF BLUE MCHARTY

LEAVING for a time Castle Cave and the life developing there under such strange conditions, let us take another long journey to the westward, quite as far as the Land of Great Smoke, but some two hundred miles to the north of that interesting region, and advance our time by almost a year. Thus we find ourselves at Fort Benton, the head of steamboat navigation on the Missouri, the most western Government post of the red frontier, and one of the very busiest points on the great river. In addition to a strong body of troops, here were gathered fur traders, trappers, and hunters of the Rocky Mountains for the interchange of peltries and goods. Indians of a dozen tribes met here on neutral ground, travelers and explorers at this point cut loose from the last vestige of civilization and plunged into the profoundest depths of an uncharted wilderness. Also this was the center from which were conducted the very first of those mighty mining operations that have made Montana one of the greatest producers of mineral wealth in the world. From Fort Benton the hardy prospector set forth with pick, shovel, and pan, in search of the placer diggings that should

yield him a fortune. To it he returned after months of weary wandering and desperate toil, to renew his supplies and make a fresh start, or bringing the wealth that he had so hardly won.

Every steamboat, arriving or departing, was laden to the danger limit with freight and passengers, and all had their pilot houses barricaded against Indian rifle bullets that were fired at them from unsuspected coverts along a thousand miles of bluff, cut-bank, and winding shore. During the years of the Civil War steamboats were few and far between on the Missouri, and nearly every trip was marked by one or more Indian attacks, while the price of a passage between the head of navigation and St. Louis was so exorbitant that only a well-filled purse could meet it. For these reasons many would-be voyagers down the river provided their own craft and took their chances. Thus it was no infrequent sight at Fort Benton to see a *bateau*, a skiff, or even a fragile bull boat, setting forth on a two thousand mile voyage that was known to be beset with all the dangers of both sea and land. Sometimes a party of home-returning traders or miners, ready to start at about the same date, would join forces for the building of a large *bateau* in which, well armed and confident of their own strength, they had little fear but what they would get through in safety.

Such a craft as this, a big, well-equipped, flatboat having a tiny cabin aft, and a mast forward, on which

could be spread a sail for favoring winds, occupied the critical attention of a little family party gathered on the Fort Benton bluff one summer's afternoon and looking down at her. A man of about thirty, self-reliant and bronzed by long exposure to sun and weather, leaned on a rifle and gazed proudly at the wife and children from whom he had been long separated. An attractive young woman of refined features, clad simply, as became the wife of a frontiersman, held in her arms a crowing babe, while close at hand played a sturdy little chap of five or six whose every feature proclaimed him to be her son.

"Oh, Everett! It seems as though we never should get away," exclaimed the young woman, as she watched the efforts of some men who were dragging a small cannon aboard the boat. "You said we certainly would start to-day and here it is almost sunset. I sat and waited in that stuffy little cabin until I couldn't stand it a minute longer, and then I came up here."

"Where I had to come to find you," replied the man, smiling fondly upon the wife who had followed his fortunes into this remote wilderness. "I really ought to be down there helping get that gun aboard and——"

"Instead of which you very properly are looking after your family. I am sure there are plenty of men down there, unembarrassed by such luxuries, to help with that silly cannon. What are we going to carry such a thing for, anyway?"

“Because, my dear, we also are carrying the most precious cargo that has gone or will go down the river this season—my wife and children, to say nothing of something over twelve hundred pounds of dust worth a quarter of a million at ordinary rates, and double that amount at present prices, the result of a year’s work by twenty men in the diggings, and our share is nearly thirty thousand dollars. After our years of poverty and hardship isn’t that worth an extra day’s wait and the taking of extra precautions?”

“Of course it is, Everett, and I am not complaining. Only now that there is a chance of going back to dear old Kentucky I am perfectly crazy to get there. I think it is more for Kenton’s sake than anything else. He is shooting up so fast, and I do so want him to be a real Kentucky boy. You are a Kentucky boy, aren’t you, little son?”

“Yes, mamma, I is Kentucky boy same as you,” replied the sturdy youngster, at which speech his father laughed heartily.

“I don’t just see how you make it out, Mollie,” he said, “since the kiddy was born out here in no man’s land, while half of him is Yankee, anyhow.”

“Oh, no, Everett! Not half, nor even a quarter, when you consider that he shows Kentucky in every single feature.”

“Well, little woman, have it your own way. I only thank God that he has a single drop of my Yankee

blood in his veins, when I recall how nearly I missed being his father. And that reminds me! By waiting over a day I have heard something that interests me exceedingly. You remember Arnold Knighton, of course, the dear old chap who brought us together after all?"

"I remember a Mr. Knighton who very nearly separated us forever," was the reply.

"Well, I'm not so sure. I was a tough proposition in those days, there's no getting around that, and if we'd been married as arranged and gone off to Europe, I never would have been anything else. As a result you would have got rid of me within a year, and no blame to you, either, whereas——"

"Everett! How can you say such things?"

"Because they are true. When a man gets so low down that his bride has to run away from him, and his father feels compelled to disown him, he is too worthless for any decent woman to live with. But that day's business brought me to my senses as nothing else ever could, and the first thing I did after all was over, was to make four resolutions, that, thanks to your dear help, I have been able to keep."

"Oh, Everett!"

"Yes, that's right. Without your aid I never should have carried out one of them. First, I resolved to follow you up and beg for one more chance. Second, I resolved to marry you or no one. Third, I resolved

that after we were married, or while there was the slightest hope of getting you, I would not touch a drop of liquor of any description, not even the mildest beer that ever was brewed. Fourth, I resolved not to go back to my father, nor ask him for one cent of money, until, by my own exertions, I had earned at least twenty-five thousand dollars. Now, don't you see, dear, how it has been through you only that I could keep such a set of resolutions?"

"But I don't see, Everett, what Mr. Knighton had to do with your resolves."

"Everything. To begin with, he showed me by his own life what a man could make of himself, and then, by locking me up on my wedding day, he showed how utterly unworthy he thought I was to marry you. He gave me the chance to see myself as others saw me, and if I live to be a thousand I never shall forget the awful shame of that morning."

"I think he took a great deal upon himself."

"But, Mollie, he was my best friend, and had done more for me than any person in all the world, until I met you."

"Why didn't he answer your letter, then, after we were married? Seems to me a best friend might have had something to say at such a time."

"So I thought, and I have felt badly about it until to-day. Now I am inclined to believe that he had left Boston and never received my letter."

“What makes you think so?”

“That is what I started to tell you. A little red-headed Irishman, who for more than a year has been a prisoner among the Crows, and only recently escaped, came into the fort to-day from Otter Creek, where he claims to have been looking for me. It seems that we met there about two years ago, though I didn't remember him.”

“What did he want with you, Everett?”

“This is the queerest part of it, for he only wanted to ask my first name.”

“How perfectly absurd! Why did he want to know?”

“Just what I asked him, and he explained that he had spent a winter somewhere in the mountains with a man who was curious about it. It seems that the man had saved his life or something, and so this chap feels under an obligation to serve him in any way he can. As the only request the man ever made of him was for my first name, the little Irishman had promised to discover it for him. He had set out for the express purpose of asking me, and was captured by the Crows, who took such a fancy to his red head that they kept him alive on account of it. To-day he was in such a hurry to get back to his companion, because of his long absence, that he started off as soon as I had answered his question, giving me barely time to write a short note.”

“To whom did you write a note?”

“To the man who wanted to know my name, of course.”

“But who is he?”

“Oh! didn’t I tell you? Well, his name is Knighton.”

“Not Arnold Knighton?”

“That is what I asked our Irish friend, but he didn’t know. Seemed to think it was Wicasta Knighton, or something outlandish like that. Promised to ask him as soon as he found him and let me know the next time we meet, which I told him isn’t likely to be in this world.”

“Everett!”

“Well, is it? I know I never intend to come back to these diggings after once I get out of them, and as the Irishman said he should start for China the moment he had satisfied Mr. Knighton’s curiosity, why, ‘*Quod erat demonstrandum*,’ which is the only bit of Latin that sticks by me after a four years’ course at Harvard. That is the reason, by the way, that this Knighton was curious about my name, because McHarty told him I was a Harvard man, and he said that he, too, had that honor.”

“Who told him?”

“McHarty. The little red-headed Irishman, Blue McHarty.”

“What a perfectly absurd name! Isn’t it a funny name, Kenty boy?” cried the young mother, throwing

one arm about her little son and drawing him to her. "Blue McHarty. Red-headed Blue McHarty. Such a funny, funny name."

"Red-headed Boo McHarty," lisped the child, at the same time laughing heartily because his mother did.

At that moment came a startling flash and a roar from the little fieldpiece that, without their notice, had finally found its place in the flatboat of the gold miners.

"Hurrah!" shouted Everett Wester. "That's the signal for starting. We're going to get off to-day, after all. Hurry, Mollie. Come on, Kenton boy. All aboard! And then down, down, down, the river for home."

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE SHADOWS OF THE PAINTED WOODS

SLOWLY the gold *bateau* swung out from the Fort Benton landing, as though reluctant to set forth upon a voyage at once so long and so hazardous. A crowd of spectators, some merely curious, others envious, and many choking back the homesickness inspired by the sight of this homeward bound argosy, cheered the departing voyagers, and shouted after them farewell messages. On the boat itself twenty gold diggers, one woman, and two children, made cheerful answer, and then happily turned their hopeful faces down the great river.

At one long-bladed oar Everett Wester pulled with stout arms, and his wife smiled approval as she watched him.

“Kentyboy, it is too good to be true!” she cried, snatching up her little son in a tumult of joy. “See that water, honey? It is just going to flow on and on and on until it washes the shores of dear old Kentucky, our home, yours and mine, papa’s and the baby’s. And all we have to do is just to stay in this very boat and be good and patient till the water takes us there.”

At this moment the sunset gun boomed from the

fort they had left, and in answer their own little field-piece roared back a last farewell.

“Boo McHarty! Boo! Boo! Boo!” shouted the boy in an ecstasy of delight, instantly associating the sound of the *bateau's* gun with the funny name impressed upon him by the first hearing of its voice.

“I hope Mr. McHarty isn't quite so noisy as that,” laughed the happy mother. “But now, sonny, let's go into the cabin and get papa's supper ready, for he sure is going to be hungry after all that rowing.”

Day after day and week after week the gold-freighted craft glided on down the ever-broadening river, sometimes sped by favoring breezes, again urged by splashing oars, and often simply drifting with the current. Occasionally its passengers exchanged their cramped quarters for a night's camp on shore, but not often. They were afraid of Indians and they hated to lose time. So for days together they never left their boat, and some of them grew irritable with the tedium and deadly monotony of the voyage. They became suspicious, too, perhaps not of each other, but of all strangers, and to avoid questions they passed, without stopping, the trading posts of Fort Peck and Fort Union, and when Indians appeared on the bank they threatened them with their guns. Sometimes shots were exchanged, and though no one on board the boat was hit, the general feeling of uneasiness was thereby increased.

At length, after a month of this weary voyaging, the gold flatboat reached Fort Berthold, and was tied to the landing with half of its great journey completed so safely that its crew had acquired much confidence in their own skill both as navigators and Indian fighters. Thus they were in a state of mind to make light of the warnings here given them concerning the dangers they still must encounter. Only two of them went on shore to purchase supplies at the post trader's store, and the remainder of the crew, standing guard over their boat, refused to allow any person to board her.

A young Aricaree warrior, who was no other than our old friend Peninah, strolled down to the landing and attempted to give a warning against certain bands of Sioux who were camped in the Painted Woods; but the self-confident guards refused to listen and drove him away. For all they knew, he himself might be a Sioux. Anyhow, he was an "Injun," and as such must not be allowed to approach their treasure.

When those who had gone to the store returned with their supplies, they also brought warnings against the Sioux of the Painted Woods.

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed one gruff old miner, "that's just a trick to frighten us into stopping here, maybe for weeks, while these traders sell us goods at their own price. I've heard of such things being done before. We've come through a blamed sight worse Injun country than any lying ahead of us, and I for

one say, push on without taking any notice of these scarecrows. No Injun that ever lived dares make fight in front of a cannon, and that's just what we've got waiting for 'em."

As this man voiced the general sentiment the stop at Fort Berthold was promptly cut short, and the adventurous voyage was resumed. The lone woman passenger, nervously exhausted by the hardships already encountered, was at once disappointed and relieved. She had hoped for a rest on shore at this post, where there were ladies, officers' wives who had followed their husbands to the "red frontier." At the same time she had dreaded meeting them, for she had no gowns fit to wear in civilized society. Also she was impatient to push on to the glad ending of the weary voyage.

Now all talk on the *bateau* was of the Painted Woods and their possible dangers. For nearly fifty miles this famous belt of timber extended along the eastern bottom lands of the Missouri, just below its great bend. For more than a century it had been disputed ground, claimed by both Sioux and Aricaree. In the long ago a great peace council of all the northern tribes had been summoned to meet at this place, and here, for many days, on the shores of a lovely lake embowered in the forest shadows, those born to hereditary hatred had feasted and mingled together on friendly terms. The hosts of the occasion, Aricarees and Mandans, dwelling in near-by villages, were first on the

scene. Then from the far North came frost-eared Assiniboins with their tandem dog teams, and from the West the black-legged Arapahoe, well dressed and haughty. From the Northwest arrived plumed and painted Blackfeet, while with them, as guests, rode their long-time foes, the gaudily bedecked Absoraka, or Crows, with suspicious hearts and prying eyes. From the South came up the Yanktonnais, coldly staring, but with silent tongue, and beside them rode their cousins of the Ogalalah, mounted on stolen horses. Last of all, out of the East, came the hidden-faced Dakotah, Santee and Sisseton, looking straight before them and speaking only among themselves.

Buffalo, elk, deer, and antelope were plentiful; the Aricaree harvests of corn, squashes, and melons were bountiful, and all feasted together in harmony during the month of tinted leaves. Then to the feasting also came trouble. The most beautiful maiden present, the belle of the assemblage, was the daughter of Ossinaway, head chief of the Mandans. Many were the suitors she had rejected, many the bitter jealousies she had aroused. Now came the most ardent lover of all, a bold young Santee warrior who, a year earlier, as it unfortunately happened, had slain in battle the Mandan girl's own brother. In spite of this she returned his affection, and, against the pleadings, the threats, and the commands of her relatives, she prepared to leave her own people, fly with him, and follow his fortunes. He was

warned of his danger and advised to depart without her, but he would not. Then the Mandan chief issued his orders, and at midnight, on the shore of the lake of the Painted Woods, the young Santee was done to death in the very arms of his sweetheart.

Quickly rang out the fierce war cry, echoing and re-echoing through the darkness from lodge to lodge, and from band to band, until all the camps were stirred to a mighty uproar. The village criers of the Dakotah loudly proclaimed the outrage and demanded vengeance. For answer the comrades of the murdered lover streaked their faces with war paint, strung their stout bows, and thronged to his rude bier, beside which knelt the heart-broken girl. About the unheeding maiden the avengers gathered in ominous silence, and, at a signal, her drooping body was pierced with a hundred arrows. With the dawn came war, the bitter intertribal fighting that never since has ended.

The bodies of the murdered lovers were placed together among the branches of a mighty elm that stood on the shore of the hidden lake. After a little the tree withered and died, its bare trunk bleaching to the whiteness of bones. About it, for many years, gathered war parties to make their final preparations for attack, and on the white trunk of the lovers' tree young warriors painted their totem marks, together with other strange devices. Their enemies, finding these, painted in turn taunting hieroglyphics that in time were spread from

tree to tree, until hundreds of trunks were covered with rude pictographs done in gaudy colors and filled with meaning to the initiated. So the forest by the muddy waters became the "Painted Woods," and it has been the scene of more bloodshed than any strip of equal extent along the whole length of the great river.

This, then, was the place against which the voyagers in the gold *bateau* had been warned, and which they approached on the second night after leaving Fort Berthold with feelings of mingled apprehension and bravado. They had hoped to pass the ill-omened stretch under cover of darkness, but dawn found them still within its shadows, though near its lower end. Here emptied a creek flowing from the eastward through a deep, densely wooded coulee or ravine. Hidden in this coulee at the time was an encampment of Santee Sioux, still smarting from the terrible punishment recently dealt out to them by Sibley's soldiers.

A slough, or navigable channel, ran close under the cut bank, and outside of it extended a sand bar a mile in length, submerged but a few inches beneath the muddy surface.

On the morning in question, a group of Santee women were bathing and washing their clothes on this sand bar. At the head of the slough stood an aged warrior, peaceably trying to provide himself a breakfast by fishing. From up the river came sounds of voices and of splashing oars. Then a large boat filled

with people drifted into sight, through the uncertain mists hanging above the water. The Indian women hurried ashore and, hiding in a clump of willows, watched curiously to see it pass. It was headed for the swift-water channel that would carry it close under the bank.

The aged fisherman had seen enough of fighting between his people and the whites. He wished to avoid further trouble of that kind, and noting that the boat was inclined to pass close to the hidden camp, he stood up and made signs with his pole for it to keep out toward the middle of the river where it might go by unmolested.

Perhaps the white men in the boat mistook his actions or his motives. Perhaps, in that deceptive light, they thought he was pointing a gun at them. No one knows, nor ever will know, their thoughts or the motives that prompted the desperate act of that fatal morning. Their last great danger was nearly passed, safety was in sight, all they had to do was keep to the middle of the river and drift with its current in undisturbed peace. Instead, they chose to try the inshore channel, discovered an Indian gesticulating at them, and killed him with a rifle shot. As the old man fell, the Indian women crouching in the willows fled to their encampment screaming that a great boatload of white soldiers, who already had killed one of its warriors, were about to attack it.

CHAPTER XXII

“ WIPED OUT ”

IN the confusion that followed the firing of that cowardly and ill-advised shot, the gold *bateau* grounded on the upper end of the sand bar from which the old Indian had endeavored to warn it away. While striving to get their craft once more afloat, straining with pole and oar to release it from the deadly suck of the sands, the crew suddenly received intimation that they had stirred up a hornet's nest. “ Injuns ! ” cried one, and the others, giving over their efforts, looked where he pointed.

The river bank, a short distance farther down, was swarming with warriors desperate from their recent sufferings and roused to a new fury by the unprovoked murder just perpetrated. Already part of them had gained the sand bar, and even as the white men looked, these opened fire on the stranded *bateau*.

A few hastily fired rifle shots answered them, then came a flash, a roar, and they were swept by a tornado of bullets that killed a dozen of them outright and wounded as many more. As the smoke of the discharge rolled away, not an Indian, save only the dead and

helplessly wounded on the sand bar, was to be seen, and yells of triumph rose from the miners. Their joy was short-lived, however, for the recoil of the overloaded cannon, crammed to its muzzle with bullets, had opened seams in the planking of the *bateau*, and water was pouring in at a dozen places.

Now, for the first time, did the white men realize the seriousness of their situation. They did not dare fire their cannon again for fear of further wrecking their craft. Nor would they have known in which direction to aim it, for not an enemy was to be seen. Perhaps, though, the gun had accomplished its purpose after all, and perhaps the cowardly redskins, not daring again to face it, had taken to flight. Cheered by this hope, the crew began to stop leaks and bail out the inflowing water. While they were thus engaged, one man stood on the mast bench and raised himself to his full height for an observation of their surroundings. A rifle cracked from a clump of willows, and he fell dead to the bottom of the boat. Directly afterward, one of the bailers, emptying a bucket over the side, was shot through the head. No, the enemy had not retreated. The battle was on and must be fought to the bitter end.

The water in the boat was fast reddening with blood, rifle shots from river bluff and willow fringe poured in with ever-increasing accuracy of aim, though not a warrior was to be seen. The whites fired at smoke

puffs, and an occasional yell told that a bullet had found a mark. On the lower bar, piled with victims of that one cannon shot, some squaws were discovered trying to succor the helplessly wounded. They were fired upon, and one fell dead across the body of her dying husband. The others fled, and for a time the sand bar lay quiet under the morning sun.

An hour later attention was called to the fact that the Indians were removing their dead and wounded from the bar, behind the shelter of a large log that apparently had drifted in from the river and grounded just where it was most wanted. They could not prevent this, and it made no difference anyhow, so no one took further notice of the log. The defenders of the boat were fully occupied with seeking protection against a continuous rifle fire from the bank.

Suddenly, to their horrified amazement, a volley was poured into them from the opposite side, and by it a full half of their reduced number were stricken down. As the dismayed survivors sprang to that side, they saw only the log they already had noted, but now it was near at hand, and above drifted a telltale cloud of smoke. As they looked, a row of what appeared to be feathered heads was cautiously lifted from behind the log, and those of the whites who held loaded rifles discharged them in that direction.

With this, a dozen naked warriors, howling derisively at the success of their simple ruse, leaped into



Fighting desperately with pistols and clubbed rifles.

view, poured in another deadly volley, and made a rush for the *bateau*. At the same moment a couple of bull boats put out from the fringing willows on the river bank and drifted down to the stern of the doomed craft. For five minutes longer the battle raged, the few surviving miners fighting desperately with pistols and clubbed rifles, but they were too exhausted, the odds against them was too great. One by one they sank beneath bullet, arrow, and knife-thrust until, at length, the dreadful work was ended and every man of the crew had fallen.

Then the exulting savages swarmed aboard, killing those in whom still lingered the breath of life, tearing off scalps, and snatching up choice bits of booty; also, one of their first acts was to tumble overboard the cannon that they dreaded and knew not how to use.

In the little after cabin they found a fainting woman, with a dead babe clasped tight, and a wide-eyed child standing sturdily over her, as though to protect her. These sole survivors were dragged forth and taken ashore, but, as they were led toward the Indian camp, a squaw, stained with the blood of her husband whom she had seen killed a few minutes earlier, slipped up behind the white woman and, with a scream of hatred, sunk a hatchet in her brain.

At this the child, who had clung to his mother's skirts, turned with a shrill cry and attacked the murderess, tooth and nail, with the fury of a panther's cub.

For a full minute the unequal contest raged, while the grim warriors, gathered as spectators, laughed and applauded. Then the woman flung the little fury from her, recovered her hatchet, and uplifted it to serve him as she had served his mother. Ere it could descend, another squaw sprang forward, snatched up the child, and darted away.

For a short distance the first woman ran after her, the throng of spectators opening to let them pass. Then, seeing that she was being distanced, the former flung her hatchet with such vicious aim that it struck the fugitive in the shoulder. The latter staggered under the blow, but recovered and continued her flight. In another minute she had disappeared amid the forest shadows, and the tragedy of the day was ended.

The woman who had thus saved and carried away the only surviving passenger of the ill-fated *bateau* was no other than Koda, mother of Hanana, and one time wife of Wicasta. Ever since losing her own child she had been so moody, and so oppressed with melancholy, that many of those with whom her present lot was cast, tapped their foreheads significantly. For days she would wander apart, ever searching for her lost one, and calling her name. Her companions, from whom she had become estranged by her long residence among the Aricarees, only laughed at her, and attributed her strange actions to the admixture of white blood in her veins. On the day of the battle with the

bateau, Koda, as usual, was absent from camp, to which she only returned in time to see a white woman killed, and a little white boy about to share his mother's fate. All her instincts prompted her to save the child, and she obeyed them.

The victorious Sioux, after looting the *bateau* of everything they deemed valuable, and disposing of their own dead, broke camp, and disappeared from that part of the country. They knew nothing of gold dust or its value, and supposing that discovered in belts about the bodies of the dead miners to be spoiled powder, they did not remove it. So the treasure of the gold *bateau* was left, to be taken by any who might discover it, or to be swallowed by the engulfing sands.

At Fort Berthold the first news of the fight was received a week after its occurrence, by the post trader, from a couple of Mandan hunters who, attracted by a cloud of buzzards gathered about the wrecked and bullet-torn *bateau*, had stopped to visit it and study its "sign" while on their way up the river. Incidentally, they mentioned the curious fact that nearly every dead body in the boat was encircled by a belt of black sand or spoiled powder. Instantly the trader was on the alert.

"That black sand," he said, "is great medicine for white men though no good for Indians. If you will go back to that boat with all speed, and from it bring to me every belt of sand you can find, I will give you

the finest presents ever handed out to a warrior. Start at once. Don't say a word to anybody about what you have seen or where you are going. Only go quick, come back quick, and bring all you can."

So the two Mandans returned to the *bateau* of death, still lying in the sorrowful shadows of the Painted Woods, stripped every treasure belt from the moldering bodies, which they then threw into the river, and returned with all speed to the silly trader who was willing to pay for black sand. To him they handed gold dust worth thousands of dollars; to them he gave guns, blankets, and trinkets worth one hundred, and both parties were well satisfied with the transaction.

Now the story of the *bateau* fight was freely told, and among those who heard it was Arnold Knighton who, completely disguised by a beard that covered his face, happened to visit the fort about that time to dispose of a large accumulation of furs, and send to St. Louis another order for goods.

On the red frontier, during the years of strife between original owners of the soil and those who proposed to possess it by force, such incidents were so common that Knighton would not have given this one much attention, except that he was proposing to visit the Painted Woods on his way back to Castle Cave. He wished to explore them and learn something of their resources in the shape of beaver, with a view to the next season's trapping.

Thus it came to pass that the next person after the two Mandans to visit the wrecked *bateau* was the out-cast warrior, once known as Wicasta. For a long time he sat on its bullet-splintered gunwale, speculating as to the manner of men who had built it, navigated it thus far, and here died in its defense. It was rumored at Berthold that there had been a woman on board and a child, but the Mandans had failed to find any such remains. In fact, so close-mouthed had been the people of the *bateau* while at the landing, and so brief was their stay, that almost nothing was known at the fort concerning them.

As Knighton saw the boat, it contained no bodies and nothing was left to tell of its original owners except black blood stains everywhere. Even the walls of the tiny cabin into which he peered were blood spattered, while its rude furnishings had been smashed and torn. As he meditatively poked among the fragments, his eye fell on some tattered bits of calico that evidently had once formed part of a dress skirt.

"There was a woman on board, then!" he exclaimed, "and whether she was white, black, or red, God help her! I wonder what became of her and where she is now?"

A little later he started to follow up a small stream that emptied into the river near the scene of battle, and ere he had gone a hundred yards he came upon the bleached bones of a human skeleton that his practiced

eye instantly informed him was that of a woman. Mingled with them were the tiny bones of an infant.

“A white woman!” he cried, after a slight examination, “and her babe. Here, too, are shreds of calico patterned like those on the boat. Poor soul! What agonies must she have suffered before she came to this peace! But she shall have a Christian burial, or at least such shift as I can make to give her one, since nothing else is left to be done for her.”

CHAPTER XXIII

KODA "GOES AWAY"

To bury those pitiful bones, merely because they had belonged to one of his own race, Arnold Knighton labored for several hours. At the outset he had no tools for digging other than a knife, but, by searching through the old Sioux encampment, he found one of those Indian hoes, the shoulder blade of an elk, that he already was accustomed to using, and with it he opened a shallow grave among the spreading roots of a great sycamore, growing near where the lovers' tree of long ago had stood. Lining it with an armful of sweet grasses, he carefully gathered up and laid away all that remained of the unknown woman and her babe. With this done, he rested for some minutes, gazing into the grave, and trying to imagine who and what she had been. Then covering her with scented grasses, he filled the cavity with earth and above it piled a cairn of small bowlders. When all was done darkness had fallen, and he was so thoroughly tired that he made his simple bivouac for the night close at hand.

Early in the morning he rode away heading north-

east and following a chain of streams that occasionally widened into ponds where beaver dams had checked the flow of water. This route would lead him to Strawberry Lake, not far from his home among the Dog Den buttes, from which he had been so long absent that he now was impatient to regain it. Until late afternoon he rode, finding plenty of beaver signs, and so satisfying himself of the trapping opportunities here presented, that he had decided to leave the network of waterways, and, attaining open ground, attempted to reach Castle Cave that same night when, without warning, a startling incident completely changed his plans.

Over a soft carpet of fallen leaves Don Felix was advancing almost without sound, when suddenly he came to a stop, at the same time throwing up his head with a snort. His rider, glancing down, caught a quick glimpse of a pair of big, frightened eyes and a thin little face, apparently bloodstained, but unmistakably that of a white child. In an instant it was gone with only a rustle of the undergrowth to mark the direction of its flight.

Flinging himself from his horse, Knighton started in pursuit, his loud crashings through the bushes filling the small fugitive with added terror, and inspiring him to greater exertion. The chase lasted but a minute. When it ended on the shore of a tiny lake, beside which stood a rude shelter of interlaced branches, Knighton caught a glimpse of the little figure, as it

darted within this place of refuge, and in another moment he was stooping and looking cautiously into the dusky interior.

At first he could see only an indistinct form outstretched on the floor of the hut, but gradually this resolved itself into the outlines of a woman lying on a scanty bed of dry grass, while beyond it peered the frightened face of the child he had followed. There was no one else, nor was there a sign of even the rudest furnishing. Knighton spoke soothingly in Aricaree and Sioux, but received no reply. Then he tried English, and promptly was answered by a childish voice, trembling but defiant.

"Bad man, go away!" it commanded.

"No. I am not a bad man," expostulated the newcomer, entering the hut as he spoke. "I am a good man, and I have come to help you. What is the matter? Is your mamma sick?"

"My mamma gone," answered the child. "Mamma Koda pretty sleepy."

At the name "Koda" the man started, and bending over the recumbent form, regarded it intently. He now could see that the woman was an Indian clad in deer-skins; and, as he studied her emaciated features, the fact slowly impressed itself upon him that she indeed was Koda, his one-time wife and the mother of Hanana. She lay with open eyes and, in spite of his disguising beard, evidently recognized him, but, as evidently, she

was without the powers of speech or motion, and her breathing was barely perceptible.

In this emergency Knighton hurried to where he had left Don Felix, and, returning with the horse, took a small flask from one of the saddle pockets. A few drops of its contents, forced between the woman's teeth, gave her a trifling access of strength, and she managed to whisper the single word "Hanana?"

"Our little daughter is alive and well, Koda, my wife," replied Knighton, kneeling beside the dying woman. "She has been with me all the time and I shall care for her always. But tell me something of yourself and of this child. Where did it come from? Whose is it?"

The woman struggled to answer, but could not. She could only smile faintly into the man's face. Then her eyes closed and, with a sigh that sounded as though it were of great content, she fell into the sleep of utter peace.

For a full minute Arnold Knighton continued to kneel beside her with a finger on her pulse, incredulous that this life, once so intimately connected with his, had passed from it forever. At length came a movement on the opposite side of the dead woman, and a plaintive little voice announced:

"Mamma Koda very sleepy. Kentyboy very hungry."

"So you're a boy, are you?" replied the man,

starting from his reverie. "And your name is Kenty, and you are hungry? Poor little chap, you look it. Yes, Mamma Koda has gone to sleep, and we must not wake her. So let's go outside and find something to eat. Will you come with me, Kenty?"

For a moment the child regarded the stranger earnestly. Then, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny of the bearded face, he stepped gravely to where the latter knelt, and they left the hut together hand in hand.

The only food just then available was crackers and cheese that Knighton had brought from Berthold, but he gave the child of these, while he made a fire over which to cook something more substantial, and the latter ate them with the ravenous hunger of starvation. And starvation showed itself in his every feature. His cheeks were hollow, his hands were like bird's claws, and his poor little body was so pitifully thin that it seemed almost a shadow. Both face and hands were stained with the blood-red juice of wild grapes that he had been eating when Don Felix first discovered him. He was bareheaded, barefooted, and nearly naked, only a few remnants of clothing hanging in tatters about him, and his body was covered with a network of scratches from twigs and briars; but he carried himself with an air of sturdy self-reliance that straightway won Arnold Knighton's heart and compelled his admiration.

Just outside the hut were the cold embers of a fire that long since had gone out, and, relighting these, Knighton toasted some strips of dried buffalo meat, one of which he gave to the boy. The latter, after eating it hungrily, ran down to the pond and, lying flat on its edge, took a long drink of water. Then he hurried back and asked for more supper. Finally, with his hunger satisfied, he became sleepy, and could only give the vaguest answers to the many questions by which the man tried to learn his history.

“ I is Kentucky boy. I got papa, mamma, and sister. They gone away. My name is Kentyboy. I very sleepy and want to go to bed. ‘ Now I lay me—’ Mamma Koda doesn’t know ‘ Now I lay me.’ Isn’t that funny? Yes, I is a dood boy. Is you a dood man? Does you know ‘ Now I lay me ’? No. I doesn’t love Injuns. Bad Injuns make big noise, Boo McHarty noise. Doesn’t you know big Boo McHarty noise? I does. Boo, Boo, Boo McHarty!”

This was all that could be got out of the child that night, for, with the last word, his sleepy eyes closed, and nestling trustfully in the strong arms of his new-found friend, the little chap drifted away to the land of pleasant dreams.

But his simple prattle had filled the man who held him, and who sat motionless that the boy’s slumber might not be disturbed, with a tumult of new emotions and unanswered questions.

"How could this child have known Blue McHarty? Could there be two Blue McHartys? It did not seem likely. So he was a Kentucky boy and his name was 'Kenty.' Did that mean Kent or Kenton? If the latter, could the little chap be of kin with the girl he once had loved so hopelessly? It wasn't probable, of course, but then, he might be. How had he happened here with Koda? and how had both of them been reduced to such a pitiable plight?"

While Knighton pondered these things the moon rose, and presently the little lake was silvered with unclouded light. With this to guide his steps, the man gently laid the sleeping child on his own blanket, covered him against the night chill, and then went to the hut to discover, if possible, the cause of Koda's death. It could not be starvation in this land of plenty, besides, he had noted near the fireplace numerous bones of small animals, birds, and fish.

Lifting the fragile body out into the moonlight, he quickly found that which he sought. A wound in the woman's back, that she could not reach to care for, had gangrened, and she had died of blood poisoning. Thus was the least important of his questions answered.

He did not want the child to see her again, and so he decided to bury the poor, tortured body at once. Fortunately, the soil at this point was lighter and more easily worked than that in which he had dug for a similar purpose on the preceding night, for now he had

not even an Indian hoe, but must work with his knife and sharpened stakes. It was midnight and the moon rode high in the heavens before his sad task was finished, and the woman who once had been so much to him was put away from mortal view forever.

After a bath in the lake, at once refreshing and cleansing, the man lay down beside the child so strangely consigned to his care, and quickly fell into the sleep of weariness, leaving only Don Felix on guard. When next he awoke, the sun was already up and shining brightly. At once he looked to see if his little companion still slept, but to his dismay the child's place was vacant.

Springing up in consternation, he was attracted by a splashing in the lake and, running to the water's edge, was amazed to see a curly head bobbing on the surface full fifty feet from shore. The man's first thought was that the child had waded beyond his depth and was drowning. As he was about to plunge in to the rescue, the boy caught sight of him and, uttering a joyous shout, began to swim in his direction with sturdy strokes and the perfect confidence of one for whom water holds no terrors.

"Dood morning," said the little chap politely, as he emerged, all dripping, on the beach. "I'se awful hungry, and I'se been ready for breakfus a long time."

"I see you are dressed for it," replied Knighton,

with an amused glance at the tatters of clothing that the boy had not deemed it worth while to remove before going in for his bath.

"Yes," replied the latter gravely. "But this isn't my best suit. I only wear that Sundays and in Kentucky."

"Where is it now?" asked Knighton, thinking thus to gain a clew.

"On the boat," was the prompt answer.

"On what boat?"

"Why, the big boat, of course, on the river that goes by Kentucky."

"How did you happen to leave the big boat?"

"I just came on shore with my own mamma, but she went away somewhere and I couldn't find her."

"What happened then? I mean what did you do after your mamma went away?"

"Came here with Mamma Koda and caught fish—oh, such a lot and such pretty ones! But Mamma Koda kept getting sleepier and sleepier, and bimeby she wouldn't catch any more fish. Then I got awful hungry, and I am now, and I wish she'd wake up and get me some breakfus."

"She did wake up," answered the man gravely, "and went away, never to come back."

"That's what they all do!" exclaimed the child, with a sudden petulance. "My papa's gone away, too, so now I haven't got any, unless, perhaps, you'se it,"

he added with an after thought, and looking speculatively up at the tall stranger.

“I’m going to try and be it, God helping me,” answered the man, with a sudden access of tenderness, at the same time snatching up the tattered waif, clasping him tight in his arms, and kissing him.

“Then,” said the little chap, “I wish you would give me my breakfus quick, so I can go riding on your black horse. I like horses, and he looks like a pretty good horse.”

“Born and raised in Kentucky sure enough,” chuckled the man, as he meekly proceeded to obey the order thus issued.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WAYS OF A MAID

THE boy was not heartless nor devoid of natural affection in seeming to forget so quickly those who had loved him, and in accepting their unexplained absence with such composure. He was too young to realize what had happened or the irreparable loss he had sustained. He did not even know that the dear ones who had left him would never again return. During the whole of his short life he had been accustomed to prolonged absences on the part of his father, and at the time of the fight on the *bateau* he had been so closely confined to the cabin that, beyond hearing the sounds of strife, he had little knowledge of what was taking place. Consequently he had no idea that his father was killed, but merely thought of him as having gone away, and due to appear at the proper time.

Then he had been hurried ashore with his mother and little sister, much frightened by the Indians who surrounded him. Someone had struck his mother, and in a blind fury he had sprung at the aggressor. Then someone else had carried him away, and the next thing he knew he was leading a delightful, vagabond existence, with a person who also claimed to be a mamma,

and who, until she grew so very "sleepy," proved a fair substitute for the mamma who had gone away, though, of course, to return to him some time. Now "Mamma Koda," as he had learned to call the new occupant of that position, had in turn disappeared, and a very agreeable papa, who owned a most fascinating horse, had taken her place.

All grown-up people seemed to act in this absurd manner, and the boy, after much thought, had come to the conclusion that it was because they didn't have any papas or mammas bigger than themselves to teach them better. Therefore he was determined to watch this present papa very closely, with a view to promptly nipping in the bud any attempt at disappearance if it included the carrying off of Don Felix.

Already Kenty had learned the name of the black stallion, besides making advances toward a friendship that had not been wholly rejected. A little later, to his intense satisfaction, he found himself mounted in front of his new papa, perched higher in the air than he ever had been before, allowed to shake the bridle reins as much as he pleased, and riding gayly away from the scene of his recent, but already forgotten, hunger. He just had eaten a hearty breakfast, had reached the summit of his present ambitions, was without a care, a sorrow, or a regret, and consequently had almost attained perfect happiness. He only wished that he were sole occupant of the saddle and that the big

man would not persist in attempting to exercise a controlling influence over those reins.

Of course, the boy had no idea of where they were going, nor did he care. What with the responsibility of managing that horse and the uttering of joyous cries at the sight of an occasional distant buffalo, or a fleeting bunch of antelope, a sneaking coyote, certain prairie dogs, owls, and meadow larks, he was so fully occupied that he found little time for conversation, much less for noting the remarks of his companion. He vaguely realized that the big man was talking about a new mamma and a new little sister, whose name, as he understood it, was Babette, and of various other people and things of the remote future that had no earthly connection with the glorious present, and consequently formed utterly futile topics for conversation.

After a time the sun grew hot, the motion of the horse became monotonous, and under these combined influences the little chap gradually lost interest in his surroundings, until finally he was fast asleep in the arms of the big man. Of course, he knew that he hadn't really been asleep at all, but had just closed his eyes for a moment on account of the sun's glare, when, an hour later, he suddenly was roused by a loud and most unaccountable noise close at hand.

"What is it?" he demanded, opening his eyes very wide and glancing about him, more frightened than he would have acknowledged.

“It is only Babette, singing a welcome home,” replied the big man reassuringly. “Here we are at last, and you have waked up just in time. There’s your new sister now, running to meet you. Hello, little daughter! Hello, Simon! *Ici*, Zeph’ine! Here is another waif of the wilderness for you to pet and mother.”

As he spoke, the man dropped his burden into the arms of the big-hearted Frenchwoman, who already had outstretched them to receive it. Then, springing from his horse, the fond father picked up Hanana, tossed her in the air, and gave her a dozen kisses before again setting her down. About the same moment Kenty managed to escape from the latest candidate for a motherly position, and was staring at the little girl with a lively curiosity. His knowledge of girls was confined to his own baby sister and a few other specimens of similar age whom he had encountered, but contemptuously ignored, at Fort Benton. That girls could grow to be so big as this one was a revelation. Also the little maid, who was returning his stare with interest, had, as he believed, just exhibited a talent that aroused his respectful admiration.

“Do it again,” he commanded.

“Do what?” asked the little girl.

“Sing a song of welcomehome, like you just did.”

“I didn’t. I don’t know what you mean.”

“Yes, you did. This way—” Here the boy lifted his voice in a recognizable imitation of a donkey’s bray.

“That wasn’t me!” exclaimed the little girl scornfully. “It was Babette.”

“You is Babette.”

“No, I isn’t. My name is Hanana.”

“He said you was Babette; and anyhow that’s lots prettier than ‘Hanna.’”

“It isn’t prettier and it isn’t ‘Hanna,’” denied the little girl indignantly. “Babette’s just only a mule; but Hanana’s a lady. Zeph’ine says so. I think you’re a horrid little boy, and I don’t love you one single bit.” Then, shrewdly changing the subject of conversation, she added: “I wouldn’t love anybody that weared such ragged clothes. I should fink you’d be ’shamed of ’em.”

“Huh! I’s got lots more, best ones, on the boat.”

“What boat?”

“The great big boat I live on. You didn’t ever live on a boat, did you?”

“No. I wouldn’t. I live in a castle,” answered the little maid with a superior air.

“I don’t believe it,” was the ungallant reply of a young man who had a wide knowledge of castles, gained through fairy tales told him by his mother.

“I do, too. Come, and I’ll show you.”

Nothing loath, Kenty promptly accepted this invitation, and the two children ran together down the hillside. At its foot they crossed the little stream on stepping-stones, and a moment later had disappeared within the Fox Gate. This movement had not been

noted by their elders, who, leaving them in amicable converse, had entered the Le Fevre cabin to discuss some matters of business.

“I doesn’t call this a castle,” sneered the boy, stopping just inside the dusky entrance. “I calls it a cave.”

“Of course, this part where Don Felix lives is a cave,” replied the young hostess; “but the other part, where I and papa live, is a truly castle, and the whole is Castle Cave. Come along, and I’ll show you. You needn’t be afraid of the dark, ’cause it’ll get lighter pretty quick.”

“Who’s afraid? I isn’t,” declared the boy, promptly dismissing all thoughts of the retreat he had meditated but an instant earlier.

“Take hold of my hand,” admonished Hanana, “and I’ll lead you through the dark places, so you won’t fall.”

“No,” retorted Kenty, putting both hands behind him. “I won’t fall, ’cause I can see in the dark just as well as you can. I can see almost as well as a kitty-cat.”

“I can spell cat,” boasted the little girl.

“So can I. K-A-T, cat.”

“That isn’t right. It’s C-A-T, cat. The book says so.”

“I doesn’t care what the book says. How do you spell kit?”

“K-I-T, kit.”

“ Well, if kit is K-I-T, then cat must be K-A-T.”

“ But the book——”

“ Who makes books ? ”

“ I don't know,” replied the little girl, who had a vague idea that books had existed from the beginning of all things. “ I suppose God.”

“ No,” retorted the boy scornfully. “ He wouldn't bother. Just grown-up people, like fathers and mothers, make books. And they don't do it till they's so awful old that they's unremembered most everything they ever knew. That's the way with spelling cat in the book. The grown-up that had to do it just forgot how. Do you know the difference 'tween a black cat and a black hat ? ”

“ Isn't any.”

“ Isn't any difference 'tween a cat and a hat ? Oh, what a silly ! ”

“ But you said——”

Just here the conversation was interrupted by a cry of pain from the boy ; for, in striding valiantly through a dim passage, and asserting his independence by not following exactly in the footsteps of his feminine leader, he had stumbled against a projecting ledge. Now he sat on the rocky floor, with bitter weepings, tenderly nursing a stubbed toe.

The little girl might have made sarcastic remarks, but she didn't. Instead she soothed him and extended a helpful hand, which he meekly accepted and clung to

until they emerged into the final daylight of the upper opening that led to the Rocking Rock. With the outlook thus afforded, the boy acknowledged that Hanana's place of abode did bear certain resemblances to a castle.

The lower half of the opening had been roughly walled up to keep Hanana from venturing out on the Rocking Rock. As soon as the boy saw this he became ambitious to surmount the barrier and explore the slope lying beyond. With him, to desire a thing was to seek its immediate accomplishment, and in less than a minute he was perched astride the low wall.

"Come on!" he cried; "let's go outside and see things. I don't like that old, dark cave, anyway."

"I can't," replied Hanana. "My papa told me not to."

"Well, he didn't tell me not to, and he isn't my father, anyhow. So I'm going, and I don't think it's very safe for you to be left all alone. There might be bears or somefin."

What should the little girl do? She didn't want to be left all alone with possible bears, and she did want to follow that fascinating boy. She wished to obey her father, but an instinct of hospitality warned her that she ought not to neglect her guest nor suffer him to wander unprotected amid unknown dangers.

"Wait," she called. "Please come back!" But the boy, paying no heed, began to clamber down the other side of the barrier.

“ I can’t climb all alone,” cried the little girl despairingly. “ How can I come if you don’t help me ? ”

At this the boy promptly regained the top of the wall and, extending a grimy little paw, said: “ Hurry up.”

A few minutes later both children were running through the cheerful sunlight up the rocky incline, impatient to see what lay beyond. Suddenly, when they were almost at the top, there came a dreadful noise, together with an awful movement of the solid rock beneath them, and they sat down very quickly, clinging to each other in terror. When all was again quiet and they dared once more to look about them, they saw a gentle grassy slope close at hand, and hastened to gain it, for the rock they just had traversed seemed too unstable to be trusted.

“ I specs bofe of us together was too heavy for that old rock,” suggested the boy. “ Anyhow, I don’t like old rocks, and I fink we’d better not try it any more.”

“ But I want to go back to my own castle,” objected the little girl, with a suspicion of tears in her blue eyes.

“ You may, but I sha’n’t,” declared the boy, starting down the grassy slope as he spoke.

“ Oh, wait! wait for me! ” cried the little girl, running after him; and then, hand in hand, they wandered forth together into the great unknown world.

CHAPTER XXV

A DESERTER OF SEVERAL NAMES

WITH all thought of consequences cast to the winds, the children ran happily down the grassy slope, one of them glad to have escaped from the gloom of Castle Cave, and both thankful to get away from a place where the apparently solid earth groaned and moved beneath them. When they reached the bottom, the little girl wanted to turn in one direction, which happened to be the one leading toward the home they wished to find, while the boy declared in favor of the other. Eventually they took the other, and continued to penetrate deeper and deeper into the wilderness as fast as their little legs could carry them. At the summit of every rise they rested and gazed eagerly about them for indications that they were approaching the Le Fevre cabin. Then, as none was presented, they would hurry down the farther side, and hopefully climb the next hill. Or perhaps they would continue down the valley to its mouth and then turn whichever way appeared the easier.

So they wandered, ever growing more weary and footsore and bewildered, until, to their dismay, the sun

set and dusky night-shadows began to enfold them. Now, not only were they exhausted, but they were thoroughly frightened as well; and, throwing herself on the ground, the little girl began to cry. The boy shared her unhappiness and easily could have joined his tears with hers but for an instinct of manliness that forbade. He was the stronger, and must be the protector, assuming a cheerful confidence he was far from feeling. So he nestled beside his weeping companion, and, throwing a comforting arm about her neck, attempted consolation.

“Don’t cry,” he urged, “’cause the bears might hear you. If we keep awful still, they can’t never find us in the dark.”

“Can’t bears see in the dark?” inquired the little girl with a show of interest. “Kittys can, and owls.”

“No, of course not. In the dark bears is just as blind as mice.”

“Is mice blind?” asked the child, to whom the fairyland of nursery rhymes was an unknown region.

“Course they is. Don’t you know ‘Three blind mice, see how they run’?”

“What did they run for?”

“’Cause their tails was cut off.”

“Who cut ’em off?” inquired the little girl, no longer sobbing, but sitting up and full of curiosity.

“Why, the farmer’s wife with a carving-knife, of course. Didn’t you know that?”

“ I don’t know what a farmer’s wife with a carving-knife is. Tell me.”

“ Oh, dear! What a lot of fings you don’t know! ” sighed Master Wisdom. “ I specs it’ll take you years, and years, and years to find out all the fings I know, and then I don’t believe you’ll know ’em all.”

“ Tell ’em to me now, this very minute, every one of ’em,” demanded Miss Eager to Learn.

“ Well, I knows Baa-Baa, Black Sheep, and Ding-Dong Bell, and Ricketty, Ricketty, Ree, and——”

“ I is a ’Ricaree,” interrupted the little girl.

“ What’s a ’Ricaree? ”

“ Don’t you know that? ” inquired Hanana with an air of surprise. “ Why, ’Ricaree is the most people in all the world. They’s more than Sioux.”

“ What is a Sioux? ”

“ Don’t you know that either? I fought you knowed everything. My mamma Koda is a Sioux.”

“ Mamma Koda’s my mamma,” cried the boy. “ I mean, she was my mamma, only she isn’t now, ’cause she’s gone away. If she’s your mamma, too, we must be bruvvers.”

“ You mean sisters,” corrected the little girl.

“ I don’t mean sisters, ’cause I wouldn’t be a sister,” declared the young man. Then, hastily, to ward off further discussion of a knotty problem, he asked: “ Is mamma Koda your mamma now? ”

“ No, Zeph’ine’s my mamma now, and I want to

see her awfully, 'cause I is hungry and cold and sleepy and scared and everything."

With this pathetic statement Hanana resumed her sobbing, and the boy realized that all his efforts toward restoring cheerfulness had gone for naught. As he gazed despairingly about him, wondering what he should do next, his eye caught a gleam of light, and he sprang to his feet with a shout.

"There's home!" he cried, "and the supper fire."

Instantly all sobbing ceased and Hanana stood beside her companion, gazing eagerly at the light that was rapidly developing the proportions of a camp-fire, apparently near at hand. As the children hurried toward it, chattering excitedly, a sudden hail came from that direction.

"Who goes there? Halt, or I'll fire!" shouted a nervous voice; and, almost as the words were uttered, the echoes of the Dog Dens were roused to thunderous reverberation by the report of a Spencer carbine that roared through the still night like a young cannon. For an instant the children paused; but, as no harm had come to them, and as both were well used to the sound of firearms, they quickly advanced again, and before he who had fired was ready for another shot they were within the circle of firelight.

"Great Scott!" cried the man. "They're children, and white at that! What are you doing here, sonny? Where's your folks?"

But the newcomers, filled with a bitter disappointment at finding only this stranger, merely stared at him in silence.

"I mean, where's your father and mother? You haven't got lost, have you?"

"They's gone away again," replied the boy in a resigned tone, finding his tongue at last, "and I specs you's it now. Anyhow, I's hungry and want my supper."

"I is hungry, too," piped up the little girl. "And I want my supper and Zeph'ine."

"Well, if this don't beat the Dutch!" ejaculated the stranger, who was a red-headed young fellow, clad in a flannel shirt, faded army-blue trousers, and quartermaster's brogans. "Two little kiddies out here in the wilderness, like they'd dropped from the sky. What's your name, sonny?"

"Kentyboy," was the prompt reply. "And she's Hanna. Is you Boo McHarty?"

"Is I who?" asked the bewildered man.

"Boo McHarty—Redhead Boo McHarty."

"Not that I know of, I ain't. What made you think I was him?"

"'Cause you is a redhead and makes a big Boo McHarty noise."

"I want my supper," persisted the little girl.

"You shall have it, sissy. I was just a-going to bile a kettle. All I've got is sowbelly, hard-tack, and

coffee; but, such as it is, you'll be welcome. I'll have it ready in a jiffy."

As the speaker turned to make good his word he nearly tumbled over backward with terror at sight of a big man, clad in buckskin, who, with moccasined feet, had approached so noiselessly that he had entered the circle of firelight undiscovered. The proprietor of the camp made a spring for his carbine; but, without noticing him, the big man snatched up Hanana, who already had uttered a joyful shout of "Papa!" and was holding her tight.

"Thank God, little daughter, that I've found you!" he cried. "How could you run away and leave me?"

"I didn't run away, papa. I only showed Kenty the Castle, 'cause he said we didn't have any. Then he wanted to go home another way, and I had to go, too, so he wouldn't get lost."

"Then you are the runaway, are you, you young villain?" asked the big man, turning to the little chap.

"No, I isn't a runaway," replied the boy with stoutly indignant denial. "I just was bringing home this little girl, and this Boo McHarty man was going to give us some supper. Now I s'pose he won't."

At this mention of Blue McHarty, Hanana's father whirled about for a look at the proprietor of the camp, to whom, thus far, he had paid slight attention.

"Is that your name?" he demanded.

"Not if I know it," answered the man, "though

the lad insists on calling me by it. I thought my name was Peter Absalom Jones, but perhaps it isn't. Anyhow, I never heard of Mr. Blue McHarty before, and don't know the gentleman."

"I had a dear friend of that name," explained the big man, "but I've lost track of him, and would give a good deal to know where he is now."

"I want my supper," broke in Hanana, who could not see the use of all this talk while other things of so much greater moment were awaiting attention.

"Of course you do, little daughter, and you shall have it just as soon as I can get you home."

"I was just a-going to rustle a bit of grub when you happened along," said Mr. Absalom Jones. "And if you'd stop for pot-luck, I'd be pleased to have you. I haven't got much; but you're welcome to what there is."

"Thank you," replied the big man; "but supper is waiting at home, and also there is so much anxiety there on account of these children that I think we'd best be getting back as quickly as possible. Won't you come with us? I should be most happy to entertain you over night, and longer if you can stop."

"I'm obliged to you, sir, and would be glad to go, if it wasn't that I'm carrying dispatches and must push on as soon as I've had a sup and a bite," was the answer.

"In that case," said the other, "of course, I won't

try to detain you. When you come back, though, I hope you will stop and give me the chance of expressing some of the gratitude I feel for your kindly care of these little runaways. Also for firing the shot that directed me to them."

"Good Lord!" thought the man. "A shot that nearly killed them." But, aloud, he said: "It's nothing at all, sir, and I'm proud to have been of service."

Then the big man sounded a shrill whistle that brought Don Felix trotting into camp, and in another minute he had ridden away, with the boy perched in front of him and Hanana held in his arms. An hour later two children, who had just eaten all the supper they could hold, were nestling contentedly in Zepherine's ample lap, enfolded by her kindly arms and with heads pillowed against her bosom.

"I likes that Boo McHarty man," murmured the curly headed one sleepily; "but I fink I likes mammas bester."

About that same time the individual thus designated was resaddling an already weary horse for a night ride that should materially increase the distance between himself, a deserter from Fort Berthold, and the man whom he had recognized as Mr. Arnold Knighton.

"Maybe he didn't tumble to me," soliloquized the deserter, "and again perhaps he did. Anyway, it's best to be on the safe side. 'Blue McHarty.' That's a

better name than the one I give him, and I believe I'll take the loan of it."

Many months later, nearly four years in fact, a St. Louis contractor, who was engaging men for railroad work in Kansas, called out the name "Blue McHarty," and in reply two men, both red-headed, stepped out from the gang of applicants whom he was considering.

"Are there two of you?" queried the contractor. "Well, I can't take but one, and you'll have to settle betwixt you which it shall be."

So the two candidates stepped aside for a settlement.

"Now, Redhead," began one, "where'd ye get me name?"

"Redhead yourself!" retorted the other. "What's the matter with its being my name?"

"Bekase it was giv to me by the praste in christening, and there couldn't be another like it in all the worrld."

"Yes, there could, for the same name was giv to me some years ago by a little lad, many a hundred mile from here, at a place called the Dog Dens; and, being in want of a good name, I took it."

"The Dog Dens, is it! And who was he?"

"Son of a man named Knighton."

"Is it Arnold Knighton, a big hairy man, you're maning?"

"That's him."

“Glory be! The very man I’m weary hunting for. Only where could he be getting hold of a son, I don’t know. Ye say his name was Arnold Knighton?”

“So he called himself.”

“And he lives at the Dog Dens?”

“He did, and that’s where I saw his children.”

“Childer is it! And how many did he be having?”

“Two, anyway. Maybe more. I don’t know. But what is it to you?”

“Nothing at all, only I’m due to go and find out. Good day till ye. You can have the job; but, wid yer kindly permission, I’ll kape the name.”

CHAPTER XXVI

MOLLIE KENTON'S BOY

AGAIN the little old steamboat *Aztec* crept up the great muddy river, and this time her cook was a red-headed, undersized Irishman, always addressed by Captain Bat Cranshaw, and consequently by the rest of the crew as "sawed-off." Long before the upper river was reached, the cook, cordially disliking his ship-mates, from captain down, was sick of his job, and longing for the day when he might throw it up. In his anxiety to reach a certain point on the river he had accepted the first berth that offered, but since then he had been bitterly envious of the swifter packets that almost daily overhauled and passed the poky little stern-wheeler on which he slaved. Still, as he was wont to remark, "It was all in a lifetime, and would soon be over."

Nor was Captain Bat Cranshaw in a particularly cheerful humor on this trip. Things were not going well with him, and he was not so prosperous as formerly. There were more traders on the river and, for him, fewer customers. For some years the Indians of the three allied tribes, Aricarees, Mandans, and Gros Ventres, who once had been among his best patrons,

had refused to trade with him, though without giving any reason for their defection. Also it had become a common thing for his boat to be fired at, especially when passing the territory occupied by these tribes; and, on account of the nature of his business, Captain Bat dared not make complaint to the Government authorities or demand protection. So he thought of giving up the river in favor of a gambling establishment in St. Louis, and had about decided that this should be his last trip.

There was one narrow place close by the Painted Woods where the current was of extra strength, and where he had twice been fired upon from the high western bank. Although he had passed this place several times since, without molestation, he always dreaded it, and always prepared to slip through it as speedily as possible by crowding on an extra head of steam. Thus, on the present trip, as the *Aztec* approached the narrows, her furnaces were roaring, dense clouds of blackest smoke were belching from her chimneys, and the whole fabric quivered with the mighty forces pent within her ancient boilers.

On the edge of the western bluffs a young Aricaree warrior, who happened for the moment to be alone, lay and watched the shabby little steamboat. He knew her well, for once he had been a passenger on board, and had deserted her to save the life of a friend who ruthlessly had been set ashore to die in the wilderness.

Since that time Peninah had not set eyes on the *Aztec*, though he had heard much concerning her misdeeds, and had exerted his influence to divert from her the trade of the allied tribes. She had become a pariah among up-river boats, and the young men who were his friends considered it rather amusing to fire at her whenever a chance presented.

Never was there a better opportunity for a shot than the present. The boat was well over toward the opposite shore, but within easy range and exactly abreast of his hiding place. With little reflection, and certainly without the intent to kill anyone, the young warrior sighted along the barrel of his beautiful new Winchester, aiming only for the middle of the boat, and pulled the trigger.

Had a dynamite shell been dropped into the *Aztec* from a high elevation the effect could not have been more disastrous. What Peninah's bullet struck will never be known, but that it reached some vital point among the overstrained boilers is certain, for with the crack of the rifle came an explosion so tremendous that it shattered the ill-fated craft to fragments. All the upper works were blown off and the hull was so rent that it sank even while shrouded beneath the clouds of smoke and steam that hung above the spot for several minutes. Through this was hurled a vast quantity of débris, some of which Peninah could hear crashing among the forest trees of the farther shore, but of human beings, living or dead, there was none to be seen.

The startled perpetrator of this deed was so alarmed at the unexpected result of his shot that, after carefully scanning the river's surface for some minutes and discovering no survivors, he beat a hasty retreat from the scene of disaster. Some hours later he joined the hunt in which he had been a participant, and which had swept so many miles back from the river that sounds of the explosion had not reached it. Finding that nothing was known and no questions were asked, Peninah so kept his secret that to this day what caused the destruction of the *Aztec*, upper river whisky trader, remains a mystery.

Although Peninah was sole witness to the explosion, other ears besides his heard it. A big man on a black horse and a small boy on an Indian pony were riding through the Painted Woods a few miles from the river. They were on a hunting trip taken for the express purpose of teaching the boy the use of a light rifle that had been built for him in St. Louis and of which he was a little more proud than of anything that ever had happened. When the dull roar, heavy as that of a siege gun, came booming through the forest, the man instantly identified it.

"There's a steamboat blown up!" he exclaimed. "Some poor souls are in trouble, and maybe we can help them. At any rate we'll go and see. Come on."

"It was a regular Blue McHarty sort of a noise," laughed the boy light-heartedly.

So the two rode to the river and reached its bank in time to see a quantity of shattered wreckage go drifting past. With this evidence that the catastrophe had happened some distance upstream, they rode in that direction until they came to a place littered with fragments of woodwork, twisted iron, and innumerable other evidences that the explosion had occurred while the unfortunate steamer was close to the bank at this point. Amid the débris they found certain human remains in the shape of dismembered limbs and fragments of burned flesh, from which the boy turned with horror. Sick of these sights, and leaving his companion to continue the search among them, he strolled toward a clump of bushes, intending to rest in their shade. Suddenly he uttered a sharp cry and came running back.

“Dad, there’s a man in those bushes!” he gasped. “I believe he’s dead, but I think he’s whole. Anyhow, he’s in there, and he’s red-headed.”

In another minute Arnold Knighton was kneeling beside the form of a man who lay apparently dead in the thicket to which he had been projected by the explosion, and whose dense foliage had lessened the violence of his descent. Examining the body for signs of life, Knighton turned it over, and as he did so he uttered a cry of incredulous amazement.

“Blue McHarty!” he exclaimed. “Blue McHarty, after all these years, here and in this plight!”

“Blue McHarty!” repeated the boy, who was looking on with eager curiosity. “Is Blue McHarty the name of a real man? I always thought it was a kind of loud noise like thunder. I remember now, though, ‘Redhead Boo McHarty,’ that’s what I’ve always said, and, of course, a noise couldn’t be red-headed.”

“Yes,” continued Knighton, “it is my dear old friend, Blue McHarty, whom I never expected to see again, and the best of it is that he still breathes.”

“Will he live, dad?”

“Kent, he’s Irish, and that alone has pulled many a man out of scrapes equally bad with this one. Besides, he is going to have the very best care we can give him, and if the combination doesn’t work, then he is a heap worse hurt than appears at first sight. Now, boy, we’ve got to hustle. The first thing is to get him out of here, and the second is to make some sort of a camp in which he can be cared for. I wish with all my heart that we had the cart so that we might remove him to Castle Cave, but, of course, we can’t get it, for I couldn’t leave you alone with him, and there is no way of communicating with Simon.”

The moon rose late that night, but by the first of her rays that shimmered the surface of the great river a slight figure might have been seen leading a pony away from the lean-to of branches beneath which Arnold Knighton dozed beside his patient. Not until sunrise was the boy’s absence discovered, and even then for a

time the man thought nothing of it, believing the lad to be taking a morning swim, as was his custom whenever near a sufficiently large body of water. Then all at once, as he busied himself about the fire, his eye was attracted to the smooth bark of a nearby tree-trunk. On it was traced in large charcoal letters,

“GONE FOR THE KART DONT WORRY KENT.”

“You young rascal!” ejaculated the man. “Now you have placed me in a predicament. Is it my duty to go after you or to remain here? I believe you know the way and there’s an even chance that you’ll get through all right. Then, I don’t believe Simon will let you come back alone. So I suppose I must stay here and await developments as patiently as may be, for if I should leave poor Blue alone for twenty-four hours, at the present crisis, the chances are ten to one that he’d be dead of fever, killed by Indians, or devoured by wolves, before I got back.”

With his line of duty thus defined, and heaving a sigh induced by his added burden of anxiety, Knighton returned to his interrupted tasks prepared to make the best of the situation. A little later, while bathing Blue McHarty’s bruised body, he came across something depending by a leather thong from the man’s neck, that at first sight he took to be a scapular. It was a thin, flat packet of buckskin about an inch and a half square,

with edges tightly sewn. As he brushed it to one side the packet was turned over, and to his astonishment he saw distinctly traced upon it in faded letters his own name, "Master Arnold Knighton."

Was the packet then intended for him, and had Blue been on his trail for the purpose of delivering it when overtaken by the accident that so nearly cost his life? As strange things had happened. At any rate he believed himself justified in opening it, and proceeded to do so, carefully cutting the threads with the point of his knife. Finally there dropped out a tightly folded note also addressed to him, "At Sod Castle, by kindness of Blue McHarty," in a handwriting that appeared strangely familiar. Hastily unfolding the closely written sheet and glancing at its signature, the man uttered an exclamation of amazement. The note was dated at Fort Benton nearly five years earlier, and read as follows:

"DEAR SIR: If indeed you are my old friend Arnold Knighton, as I am led to believe, this is to inform you that I am alive, happily married to Mollie Kenton, and the proud father of two children, a boy named 'Kenton,' always called 'Kentyboy,' as fine a little chap as ever walked, together with a girl baby as yet unnamed. Also I am fairly prosperous. By that I mean that I have succeeded in panning-out a small fortune, some \$30,000, in dust from the Bannock placers.

Now we are going home, Mollie, the children, and I. In company with some others I have built a large flat boat, having a cabin for Mollie, in which we propose to drift down the river to St. Louis. For safety our little fortune is concealed in its timbers. No one else knows of this, and I am not certain that I should tell even you were it not that we shall have reached our journey's end before you read these words.

“When I heard of you so surprisingly, through McHarty, I felt that I must write to express my everlasting gratitude for *all* that you did for me in the old life, and to beg you to give me the chance of renewing the friendship I so highly prize, whenever you return to civilization. I cannot send you my address at present as I have not heard from my people since coming out here, but when I have one I will forward it to you in care of the American Fur Company at St. Louis, hoping, of course, that you will sooner or later turn up in that city. If not, you can write to them for it.

“So don't fail to let me hear from you, and with the sincere hope that this will reach you, I remain always,

“Affectionately and gratefully,

“Your old-time friend,

“EVERETT WESTER.”

“Mollie Kenton's boy!” soliloquized Knighton as, with tears dimming his eyes, he finished reading the note

so surprisingly delivered to him after all these years. "Mollie Kenton's boy! And it was Mollie Kenton herself whom I buried, she and her babe, within a mile of this very spot. O God! the pitifulness of it, and the mercy!"

CHAPTER XXVII

SIMON GOES TO THE WARS

ALTHOUGH in the rush of recent events Knighton had not given thought to the gold diggers' *bateau* that he had visited soon after the destruction of its crew some five years earlier, now that it was so strangely recalled to his mind he began to study the landmarks of his immediate vicinity in an attempt to locate it. This was a difficult task, for in the years that had elapsed the mighty river had altered its banks, cut for itself new channels, and changed its appearance to suit its own erratic humor with the freakishness of an irresponsible giant. Still the man persevered; he had the day before him, and his patient continued to lie passively unconscious. The boy Kenton's fortune, gained by his parents through years of toil and by them defended to the death, rested somewhere out there awaiting him, and must in some way be recovered. Knighton remembered that much gold had been taken from the *bateau* by the Mandan hunters who first discovered it; but he believed this must have belonged to Everett Wester's unknown companions in the venture; for had not the former written that his own earnings were concealed in its timbers?

There, then, the gold still must await recovery if only those timbers could be located. So he searched all that day, but without result. He did not dare go very far from his patient, and frequently returned to look at him, but not until sunset was there any change in Blue McHarty's condition.

Upon returning from his last effort of that day for the finding of the *bateau*, Knighton stopped for a minute to rekindle the fire outside the lean-to. Then he looked in at his patient, and to his joy the latter lay with wide-open eyes calmly regarding him.

"McHarty, my dear fellow, this is fine!" exclaimed Knighton, kneeling beside the sufferer and placing a cup of water to his lips. The latter drank gratefully, and then, as though recalling something long forgotten, whispered, "McHarty?"

"Yes, that's your name, and I don't blame you for not knowing yourself after what you have gone through. Do you remember me? I am your old friend, Knighton of Sod Castle."

"Knighton of Sod Castle?" repeated the injured man, as though receiving this information for the first time, but in a whisper scarcely audible.

"Yes, and it's all right. You are getting along splendidly. All you have to do now is to sleep, eat, and get well as quickly as possible. So don't try to say another word, but drink this and go to sleep."

During the succeeding two days the patient, though

conscious, was so feverish and restless that Knighton dared not leave him for more than a few minutes at a time, and so was unable to resume his search for the wrecked *bateau*. Toward the close of the second day, as he sat outside the lean-to anxiously speculating concerning the movements of Kenton, who now had been three days gone, he was startled by the sound of distant rifle shots. Also it seemed to him that he heard cries of distress, or was it the shriekings of an ungreased cart?

A moment's hesitation, then, without stopping for saddle or bridle, he had leaped to Don Felix's back and was off.

A small war party of Mandans had crossed the river that evening and were about to encamp for the night in the Painted Woods, preparatory to making a raid into Sioux territory. They, too, heard the sounds that had so excited Arnold Knighton, but much closer at hand and without pause, their eager ponies were tearing in that direction. At the border of the woods the Mandans came upon a scene of such unequal contest that in another minute it must have been ended.

A little two-wheeled cart, with a desperately wounded mule in the shafts, was halted in the edge of the timber. Behind it stood a boy, steadily firing a light magazine rifle that he rested on one of the wheels, while beneath it crouched a woman and a young girl also possessed of a rifle that they fired as often as it could be reloaded. In the open, just beyond the timber, charged,

wheeled, and fired at the cart, half a dozen mounted Sioux warriors, while others on foot could be seen hurrying with all speed to the front.

As the Mandans discovered the nature of this one-sided combat, they broke from cover and with blood-curdling yells dashed at their hereditary enemies. The outnumbered Sioux fled before this onset and there was a mad scamper of ponies, until suddenly the Mandans found themselves confronted, and in turn outnumbered, by a strong body of dismounted Sioux warriors, who leaped as though by magic from the tufted grasses. Before their fatal fire a number of the Mandans went down, and the survivors scurried for the shadowy shelter of the forest with the triumphant Sioux in hot pursuit.

Again did adverse fortune seem about to overtake the stout-hearted but woefully weak defenders of the cart; for in their impetuous flight the Mandans rode past it, and except for the slender fire of its two rifles, it lay at the mercy of the onsweeping foe.

Of a sudden there came from the forest a sound that caused some of the Sioux to draw rein. It was a war cry, long-drawn and terrible as when they had heard it on the night of the Great Spirit's wrath on the bluffs behind the Aricaree village, and they knew it for the voice of Wicasta. Then from out the dusky shadows burst the fierce black stallion, and the double stream of fire from two revolvers, that preceded him, carried

death and consternation into their ranks. With a few ineffective shots from rifle and bow they turned and fled. After them thundered Don Felix and the Mandan horses, while the rear was brought up by a shrill-voiced boy who bore a light rifle and frantically urged a reluctant pony to greater effort.

The big man on Don Felix was first to give over the chase, and turning back he allowed the exultant Mandans to dash past him. Then he encountered the boy.

"Hello, Kent!" he shouted. "Pull up and let us hear the news. Where's Simon? Not hurt, I hope."

"He isn't here, dad, but sister and Zeph'ine are, and I expect they'll be awful glad to see you."

"What *do* you mean?" cried the big man, seizing the pony's bridle rein and compelling him to turn. "What is Hanana doing here, and who is looking out for her? Where is Simon?"

"Simon's gone to the war, dad, and Zeph'ine's taking care of sister. I tell you she's a good one, too, and can handle a rifle almost as well as I can."

"Is either of them hurt?"

"Not that I know of, dad; but there's the cart now and you can see for yourself."

"How dared you leave them, sir?"

"Just had to, dad, when I saw those Santee running; they'd been chasing us, you know."

This last remark was unheeded, for the man had

flung himself to the ground and was straining to his heart the little daughter that he would not for worlds have exposed to this danger.

“O papa! I never was so glad to see anybody, and poor Babette! I’m afraid she’ll never sing any more. And, papa, you just ought to have seen Zeph’ine shoot. She’s as good as a soldier.”

“Better than some, I’ve no doubt,” replied the man. “But what does this mean? Why are you here? Where is Simon?”

“That pig of a Simon is gone to the war, monsieur. *Oui*, thinking you instantly would be back, he is gone, leaving us for the protecting of ourselves.”

“What do you mean, Zeph’ine? What war?”

“That war *au demi-sang par* Fort Garry. The war of General Riel. Some mans tell him of it and he is so fierce for fight that not anybody, not me myself, can stop him. So I tell him go; and if he nevaire *retournez* I care not at all. Then come *'tit monsieur* and say that you mus have Babette *avec charrette* right away queek. *Mais* we may not be leave, so we come *aussi*, and but for *les sauvages* we will have *un bon voyage*. *C'est donc, monsieur, nous voilà.*”

“Yes, I see you are here,” replied Knighton dubiously, “and I am thankful enough to find you alive and unhurt, but what I am to do with you Heaven only knows. You say Babette is hurt?”

“Wiped out, dad,” replied the boy, who had been

bending over the now prostrate mule. "Poor 'welcome home' will never sing another song."

"Then we must hitch your pony to the cart, for I wouldn't dare trust Don Felix. We've got to hustle, too, and be off before it grows pitch dark, or we'll never get through the woods. I expect we'll have to make torches as it is."

This prediction proved correct, they did have to make torches, and night was well advanced before they reached the little camp by the riverside in which poor McHarty had almost ceased to hope that anybody ever would come to give him another drink of water. The newcomers had brought plenty of provisions from Castle Cave, and Zepherine soon had ready a bountiful supper, of which even Blue was allowed to eat a small portion. After supper Mr. Knighton sat down with the children and questioned them.

"Yes, papa," said Hanana, "it was just as Zeph'ine told you. Simon was out hunting and met some men he knew hurrying to what they call the Half-Breed war up at Fort Garry, and he came tearing home so excited he scarcely could talk. He said he must go at once, and that it was perfectly safe to leave us because you surely would be home that night. Zeph'ine was very angry and told him that if he went he might stay, for she wouldn't ever have anything more to do with him. But he didn't mind a word she said. He only kept repeating that he was a brave man and must fight for

his country. Then he went away and it wasn't more than an hour afterward before brother came."

"Lucky thing I did," put in the boy, "for they both were pretty well scared, I can tell you."

"Nothing of the kind!" was the indignant rejoinder. "We weren't half so scared as you were this afternoon when you found those Santee were after us."

"Only 'cause I was afraid they'd catch us before we could reach the timber. I knew we could stand 'em off there, all right."

"Both of you had good reason to be scared," said Hanana's father, "and both of you have behaved splendidly."

"Zeph'ine, too, papa! You just ought to have seen her fire that rifle."

"Zeph'ine, too. And I've no doubt she did a thousand times better than Simon would have done in her place. It is unlucky for the 'Breeds' that they haven't her in their army instead of him."

"What did you think when you found me gone, dad?" asked Kenton, who thought Zeph'ine had been praised quite enough.

"I thought, my boy," replied Mr. Knighton gravely, "that you had done a very wrong thing, and I think so still. At the same time, since all of you are safely here, I am thankful that affairs so shaped themselves. While you were away I received information that may keep me in this very place for several weeks, and I wondered

how I was going to maintain two establishments so far apart during that time. Now you are here, McHarty is doing well, and we all can stay here together while attending to the business in hand."

"What is it, dad?"

"Please, papa, tell us."

"Not to-night; you already have had excitement enough for one day, and so have I."

CHAPTER XXVIII

KENTON WESTER'S FORTUNE

ON the following morning, leaving Blue McHarty to the kindly care of Zepherine, who, never before having seen such a *cheveux rousse*, as she termed his red head, was greatly interested in him, Arnold Knighton shouldered his rifle and invited the children to go with him for a walk.

"All right, dad," answered Kenton promptly, "only let me get my gun."

"I wish I had a gun, too, papa," said Hanana. "Don't you think I might carry Zeph'ine's rifle? I have fired it off once."

"Well, hardly, little daughter; I am afraid it's a size too large for you. But after yesterday you certainly deserve whatever you most wish for. So if you really want a rifle more than anything else, I will order one for you from St. Louis."

"She can have mine, dad, if you'll order a big one for me in place of it," cried Kenton, who had returned in time to hear this promise.

"That might be a good plan," replied Mr. Knighton. "You are becoming a warrior so rapidly that I

shouldn't be surprised if you were big enough for a full-sized gun by the time it gets here."

"But you must let me have yours right off now," bargained Hanana.

"Huh!" cried Kenton, "what would I do without one till mine came?"

"Oh! I'd lend it to you whenever you needed a rifle very importantly."

"Every time I asked for it?"

"Ye-es," replied the girl hesitatingly. "That is, if I wasn't using it myself."

"All right. It's a trade," agreed Kenton, handing over the cherished weapon. "Only you must be awfully careful not to shoot yourself. And—don't you think perhaps you'd better let me carry it now?"

"No!" replied the young Diana decidedly. "In a dangerous place like this I prefer to carry it myself."

"Well, then don't point it at me, 'cause it's loaded and might go off. If you don't carry it better than that, I'll take it back."

"You can't now because it's mine, isn't it, papa?"

"By all the laws of trade I believe it is," replied Mr. Knighton. "It was a bargain made in the presence of witnesses."

"*Tite Ange!* Whatever are you doing *avec cet fusil dangereux?*" cried Zéphérine, appearing on the scene at that moment.

"I'm not a little angel any more, and I wish you

wouldn't call me one," replied Hanana with dignity. "I am a big girl now with a rifle all of my own. And it isn't a dangerous fusil either, except to my enemies."

"*Pardieu!* Hear the child talk!" exclaimed Zeph-erine, throwing up her hands. "One would think she was *La Fille d'Orleans*."

As the little party moved off, both the man and the girl shouldering rifles, melancholy Kenton almost regretted his hastily made bargain. He was empty-handed and gazed wistfully first at one, then at the other. Finally Mr. Knighton took pity on the lad and said:

"Here, Kent, I wish you would carry my gun for a while, as I find it rather heavy this morning."

Gladly did the boy assume the burden, together with its responsibility, and thus was happiness once more restored. A little later Mr. Knighton led his young companions to a prostrate log that lay near a small pile of bowlders. Seating himself on it, with a child on either side, and an arm around each, he said:

"I have brought you here to tell you something that I myself have but just learned. That pile of stones marks the grave of Kenton's own mother and baby sister."

"My own mother!" repeated the startled boy. "How do you know, dad?"

"Because I buried her there, before ever I saw you or even knew of your existence. Now it has come to my knowledge that you, together with your father,

mother, baby sister, and some other persons whose names are unknown, came down the river in a boat about five years ago, and all except you were killed by Indians near this point. Some weeks afterward I found that boat and went on board. It was totally wrecked and contained no bodies. A little later I discovered here the bones of a white woman together with those of a babe and gave them burial, but without knowing, at that time, whose they were."

"How did you find out, dad?" asked the boy in an awed tone.

"Blue McHarty had on his person a note addressed to me, and written by your father, that gave me the information."

"Did you know my own father?"

"Yes, he was my dear friend, Everett Wester."

"Did you know my own mother, too?"

"Indeed I did, son. She was another dear friend, and her name was Mollie Kenton."

"But where was I when the others were killed?"

"I found you near Painted Woods Lake, the day after I buried your mother."

"How did you know who I was?"

"I didn't then, but your father's letter opened my eyes. He wrote that he was about to embark on a flat boat for St. Louis with his wife and baby and little five-year-old-son named Kenton but called 'Kentyboy,' and when I found you, you said that was your name. Also

you knew Blue McHarty, who knew your father and who has just brought me his letter."

"Then Blue McHarty can tell me all about them?"

"I hope so when he gets stronger, but at present he is too weak to talk and doesn't seem to remember things."

"So you are not my father, and now I haven't any," said the boy mournfully, finding it hard to become reconciled to the new order of things just revealed.

"No, my dear boy, I am not your own father, but with God's help I am trying to take his place and be to you as nearly as may be what he would have been."

"You are doing it splendidly, too!" cried the lad with his eyes full of tears, jumping up and throwing his arms around the man's neck. "And I love you, and love you, and love you, and shall always call you my own dear dad."

"But you are my truly own papa?" exclaimed a jealously doubtful voice from the other side.

"Indeed I am, little daughter," responded the man, snatching up Hanana and holding her close.

When this exhibition of feeling had somewhat subsided and the children had resumed their seats, Mr. Knighton continued:

"There is one more thing to tell you and that is why we must remain here for a time. Kenton's father wrote that he had concealed some property in the boat that was to take him down the river, and I have reason to believe

that it still is there. So I am going to try and find the wreck with the hope of discovering something that will be of value to his son a few years from now."

"Wagh!" exclaimed a guttural voice behind them at this moment, and all three sprang to their feet, both the children grasping rifles. A tall Mandan warrior stood within a few paces of them smiling gravely at this show of armed force and holding out a hand to Mr. Knighton.

"Me Chief Spotted Bull," he said, "you big medicine man live Dog Den. Yestiddy you fight Sioux good. Mandan fight Sioux. Kill um plenty, get plenty scalp. Now some of my young man heap sick. You come, fix um, eh?"

"Spotted Bull," replied the white man, recognizing his visitor. "Then you are one of those who found the boat out there five years ago, and carried much black medicine to Girard the trader at Berthold?"

"Yep, me find um."

"Could you find that boat again?"

"Mebbe so."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I need some of that same black medicine myself to make me strong. You know it is very good medicine for white man but very bad for Indians?"

"Yep, Girard, him say so."

"Then, if you will help me find that boat I will do my best to fix up your young men who are sick."

"All right, me do, but you fix um young man first."

"I'll go with you this very minute. How far is your camp?"

"Littly way."

Thus it happened that a few minutes later Arnold Knighton, who always carried with him a pocket case of instruments, was exercising his professional skill in behalf of a number of badly wounded Mandan warriors whose condition had compelled their comrades to make in that place a camp that seemed likely to be occupied for some time. While he sewed up knife cuts, extracted bullets and arrowheads, or reset fractured bones, the children helped whenever they could be of service, and the uninjured warriors looked on admiringly.

After all had been attended to and the visitors had eaten a hearty meal with their Indian friends, the former started toward the river accompanied only by Spotted Bull. Leading them directly to a place where a dry bar extended into the water for some distance, and pointing with an expressive gesture to a certain spot he said:

"There big boat."

So changed were all the surroundings that Arnold Knighton could not believe he had located the wreck, until going out and probing in the sand with a stout stick he struck wood about a foot beneath the surface, at the very place indicated. Digging enough of the sand away to expose the ends of a couple of timbers and thus

assure themselves that they had indeed found the old *bateau*, the gold diggers gave over work for that time and returned to their respective camps.

On the following day, after visiting his many patients, Arnold Knighton, accompanied by a dozen lusty warriors whom he had enlisted by the promise of presents, set to work in earnest, and soon had a considerable portion of the wreck exposed to daylight. One side of it had broken off and drifted away, but the woodwork of the part that remained had been perfectly preserved under its covering of sand and water. Only the nails fastening it together had rusted so that it could be knocked to pieces without any great difficulty.

By the end of a week every remaining timber of the wreck had been removed and conveyed to Knighton's camp where they were stacked up beside the lean-to. The Indians could not imagine what he wanted with these old, water-soaked fragments, and fancied that he must be greatly disappointed at the very small quantity of "black medicine" scraped up from the bottom of the wreck, but then the white man's ways were very strange and past finding out.

Finally, with their wounded sufficiently recovered to be moved and bearing a written order on the post trader at Berthold for a liberal present in goods, the Mandans took their departure. Not until then did Arnold Knighton begin operations on his stack of timbers, but now he attacked them in earnest, and by the end of

another week he had extracted from them enough gold dust to fill ten stout buckskin sacks, that he estimated to hold twenty-five pounds weight each. Thus, by rough figuring, he had recovered from the wreck, not only Everett Wester's little fortune of \$30,000, which now must be held for Kenton, but some \$20,000 in addition.

From the Mandans Knighton had procured three ponies as a fee for professional services, and with these, in addition to the cart, there was no difficulty in transporting the entire party including Blue McHarty, now far on the road to recovery, and their treasure-trove back to the Dog Dens and the comforts of Castle Cave. As they approached the latter place, Kenton, who had impetuously ridden a little ahead, came dashing back with the news that the Le Fevre cabin had been burned to the ground. "And it was those rascal Sioux who did it, too," he declared, "before they took up our trail and followed us to the Painted Woods."

"Then am I more than ever thankful, son, that you took matters into your own hands last month, and so reunited a family that otherwise might have been scattered beyond recall," said Mr. Knighton. "Now, even Zeph'ine will have to live in Castle Cave with the rest of us, at least until Simon comes home from the wars."

CHAPTER XXIX

HANANA FIRES THE MINE

THE passing of another five-year period finds our friends still occupying their wilderness home among the Dog Dens, but under greatly changed conditions, though the changes have come so gradually as hardly to be noticed. Arnold Knighton, still known to the Indians as "Wicasta, the white medicine man," has made a truce with the Sioux and become their firm friend; also they bring their wounded and their sick to him for treatment. For nearly two years after the affair of the Painted Woods they were his enemies and made several attempts to "wipe him out." The last of these efforts was a regular siege of Castle Cave, where they had discovered the Fox Gate by following Knighton and seeing him enter by it. Then they lay in wait for his reappearance, not knowing that there was any other exit, and unconscious that they could be seen by the inmates of the castle from several well hidden, crevice-like windows.

From one of these watched Kenton Wester, a well-developed lad, able to fire with precision the full-sized rifle that had come to him in exchange for the light one now owned by Hanana.

“Dad, there are two of them standing close together and exactly in line!” he exclaimed. “I know I could get them both at a shot. Do let me try.”

“No, Kent,” answered Mr. Knighton, who stood at a table in the rocky chamber behind the boy, busily engaged with a small electric battery. “We are not yet ready to give them their lesson. Besides, I want them to concentrate all their attention on the Fox Gate without suspecting any other openings; also I desire to avoid bloodshed so far as may be. I doubt if their superstitious fear of the place will permit them to try and force an entrance, and I hope that, weary of waiting for us to appear, they will go away without compelling us to fight.”

“If they do, dad, they’ll come back again. They’ll never leave us in peace while they think they are stronger than we are.”

“I suppose you are right, son, and that we shall have to teach them a lesson sooner or later.”

Of course, by means of the Rocking Rock, of which the Indians were ignorant, the little garrison of the cave could go and come as it pleased, and it would have been easy for them to escape, provided they were willing to give up their home, but they were not, nor did they intend to be driven from it. The Indians had made a camp where Mr. Knighton expected they would, on the site of the Le Fevre cabin which they had destroyed at the time of Simon’s departure for the wars, and from

here they could command an unobstructed view of the Fox Gate entrance.

At night they stationed guards close beside it, and they were certain that no one had issued from it since they had driven a white man within its gloomy protection. So a day and a night passed in tedious waiting for something to happen. On the second night something did happen; for as the Indians were gathered in their camp, discussing the situation, there came from out of the darkness behind them a loud voice speaking in their own tongue:

“Let the men of the Dakotah depart from this place,” it cried, “and come to it no more, lest the anger of Wicasta manifest itself in a thunderbolt that may do them harm!”

“The Dakotah do not fear Wicasta, for they know him to be but a man like themselves,” shouted back a warrior, leaping to his feet and turning a defiant face in the direction of the voice.

To this came no answer, nor was the silence of the night again broken. With earliest dawn a trail of moccasined feet was found and followed to the very edge of a canyon, deep, dark, and mysterious, beyond which rose a blank wall of solid rock. There the trail abruptly ended, nor could any other be found.

The bewildered trailers had hardly disappeared on their way back, to make report, when the rock wall at which they had gazed moved slowly forward toward the

place where they had stood, and in another minute three horsemen were following after them.

In the meantime the Sioux, in spite of their bold defiance, had been rendered very uneasy by hearing behind them the voice that announced Wicasta's escape from the cave, nor could they imagine how he had accomplished it. Now that he was out, however, some of the bolder spirits among them determined to make an effort for the discovery of his secret. So as soon as the sun was high enough to throw a gleam of light into the Fox Gate, half a dozen of the youngest and most reckless made a cautious entry into the dread portal. They met with no opposition, nor could they discern cause for alarm; and with each step they advanced more boldly.

Suddenly the foremost stumbled over a tightly strung wire, raised but a few inches from the floor, and instantly, with a thunderous roar, the place was swept with a hail of bullets. As the tremendous report of the spring gun thus discharged within the Fox Gate reverberated through the upper chambers of the great cavern, a young girl, gazing nervously from one of the crevice windows with a finger resting lightly on an electric key, was so startled that she inadvertently pressed it. In instant response there came another roar vastly greater than the first, and the site of the besieger's camp on the hillside was torn as though by a volcanic eruption.

The promised thunderbolt of Wicasta had fallen, and by it the warriors of the Dakotah were hurled in every direction, wounded, stunned, or panic-stricken. Ere they could recover, they were charged by a body of horsemen led by the gigantic figure clad in wolf skins that they had learned to know and dread, but which they thought they had this time safely trapped. In another moment the siege of Castle Cave was raised, and the besiegers, leaving everything behind them, were in headlong flight that only was ended some hours later by their physical inability to continue it.

One strangely unexpected and regrettable effect of exploding that mine was that thereafter the Rocking Rock remained an immovable fixture, so that to reach it the dwellers in Castle Cave were compelled to throw a light drawbridge across the canyon.

This was the last attack ever made by the Sioux upon the white medicine man. Such of them as were left behind, both at Fox Gate and at their camp too badly wounded for flight, were tenderly and skillfully cared for by their late foes. Upon recovery they were returned to their own people, bearing presents, together with a proposition for a permanent peace between the Dakotah and the dwellers in Castle Cave. This proposal resulted in a meeting between the white medicine man and several of the Sioux chiefs at which it was agreed that thereafter the Indians should in no way molest the former, his people, or his property; while

he, on his part, promised medical attendance to any member of the tribe who should be brought to him in need of it.

To carry out his part of the bargain Knighton erected on the site of the Le Fevre cabin another log structure to be used as a hospital and dispensary. From such patients as were able to pay him he exacted fees in proportion to their means, and thus he soon began to accumulate wealth in the shape of horses, cattle, and furs. Thus did the once outcast warrior become a power for good in the land and a useful citizen of the wilderness.

In all this busy life he did not for one moment neglect his children nor forget the obligations he had assumed toward them. Early and late he taught them of his own knowledge. From St. Louis he procured books for them, and their interest in the world's affairs was awakened by the best periodical literature. That they might become familiar with the manners and customs of civilization he ordered furniture and house furnishings for Castle Cave such as befitted the home of a gentleman; also he procured for them clothing suitable for wear in cities, though it must be admitted that neither Kenton nor Hanana took kindly to this nor wore it except on occasions and by express command.

These two were the light and joy of Arnold Knighton's life, and well they might be, for never was a father blessed with children more lovable and thor-

oughly satisfactory. They were perfectly healthy, very happy, and bubbling over with the joyousness of youth. Everything that they undertook they did with a will stimulated by a common rivalry. Thus they studied, worked, played, rode, hunted, and shot together; they had differences, of course, but in the making of them up they loved each other all the more. They had many young Indian friends who were allowed to visit them and whom they visited in turn, though no Indian ever was permitted to enter Castle Cave or discover its secrets.

Thus, when the young visitors came, they went into camp or were entertained by the McHartys at the hospital, for our old friend Blue McHarty was now the head of a family. His adored wife was no other than Zepherine, one time widow of that Simon who went so gayly off to the wars only to be killed in a pothouse quarrel before ever reaching the real field of battle. Zepherine had borne her loss with a philosophical resignation which she expressed by saying: "*Oui, monsieur, zat Simon is un bon homme, a vair good man; but much more of the man good is he when he is dead than if he still lives. N'est-ce pas?*"

From the first, Zepherine had admired Blue McHarty's red head; and from their earliest acquaintance he had been charmed by her French ways. Thus when the time came they were married; and never has the world seen a more devoted couple. Also they had become fixtures at Castle Cave, where so much depended

upon them that it was impossible to imagine its affairs going on without them.

Blue McHarty had fully recovered from being blown up on the Missouri, except for a most curious lapse of memory. Of his life before he awoke to consciousness in Arnold Knighton's lean-to, he could remember nothing except what was told him. He did not know his own name until he was told that it was Blue McHarty; then he remembered perfectly. He could not tell where he was born nor where he came from until his friend suggested Dublin, when Blue said: "Av coorse." Even then he could give no description of his native city except such as was furnished him by others. Thus he was unable to tell anything concerning the Westers that Knighton did not already know and suggest, and of his long wanderings from Fort Benton *via* Sod Castle to the place where he was blown into temporary oblivion he could tell nothing, because there was no one to prompt him. He did not even laugh with his old-time heartiness until Arnold Knighton told him of his own christening and of the duty thus imposed upon him to combat the depressing influence of his name at every opportunity during the remainder of his life.

Until it was suggested to him that he had come up the river by steamer, he had no idea of how he had traveled, but then he said: "I come by steamer, av coorse." When asked what was the name of the steamer, he could only shake his head and answer:

“Divil a bit do I know. I’m thinking she had no name.” Nor did he know what had happened to her. He remembered perfectly everything from his first moment of awakening, and thus he was a man of the present, almost without a past. This situation was completely satisfactory to Mrs. McHarty, since he could say with perfect truth that he could not remember having “ever laid eyes upon anny gurrl” before seeing her.

Thus the family of Castle Cave in the Dog Dens was an uncommonly happy one and well content with their present mode of life, but at the same time dwelling in eager anticipation of changing it whenever its two youngest members should reach a certain point in their studies. Then were they to set forth on their travels into the great world, perhaps to enter school or college in that part of it known as “the East,” the land of their most romantic daydreams and of their heart’s desire.

Arnold Knighton looked forward to revisiting the friends and scenes of his youth whenever the day of freedom should arrive, while the McHartys anticipated being left in blissful and unsupervised control of everything that made up their own little world. So all waited and wondered and planned, each for himself; and when the time came, everything happened so unexpectedly that all their plans had to be revised and a whole new set hurriedly prepared.

CHAPTER XXX

A FRIEND FROM A SNOW BANK

UPON the close of the Civil War the American Government found time to devote attention to the development of its mighty western empire lying between the Mississippi and the Pacific. Work on the single trans-continental railway already begun, was pushed, and lines for other similar roads were surveyed. New trails were opened in every direction, and many new forts were established for the protection of surveyors, prospectors, miners, and settlers. Among these new army posts were two that exercised a direct influence upon the fortunes of our friends. One of them was Fort Totten, erected on the south shore of Minnewakon, or Devil's Lake, and the other was Fort Stevenson, located one hundred and twenty miles distant, at the great bend of the Missouri. Between these points a trail was opened by the yearly passage to and fro of hay contractors' outfits, an occasional military reconnoissance, and the riders of a semi-monthly mail service. This trail crossed the south end of the Dog Dens and, at its nearest point, was about five miles distant from Castle Cave, the existence of which was not known to one in a hundred of the travelers who passed that way.

Now, while the Sioux had made a treaty of friendship with Wicasta, the white medicine man, they were more than ever bitter against the pale faces in general for having taken possession of their choicest camping grounds on the borders of their beloved Minnewakon, and having forever driven them out by the establishment there of a military post. While they did not yet feel strong enough to make another definite resistance against the encroaching whites, they haunted the Fort Totten trail to cut off every unfortunate who fell in their way, and especially the mail riders, until it became known as the most dangerous mail route in the Northwest. Finally the authorities ceased sending out soldiers with the mail, and employed only the most skillful plainsmen, generally half-breeds, in the service. Even these often were held up, sometimes killed, and, when caught, invariably robbed of their mail sacks, whose contents were destroyed. The situation at length became so desperate that for a time the route was abandoned. That it was resumed was owing to the discovery, by the commandant at Fort Stevenson, of one person who could traverse the deadly trail with impunity. This was a stalwart young fellow known as "Kent" Wester, who frequently visited the post to obtain goods brought up the river from St. Louis and consigned to a certain Arnold Knighton. Sometimes young Wester brought in valuable pack loads of furs for shipment; but always he came and went without trouble.

One day it happened that the commandant, having important dispatches that must be got through to Fort Totten with all speed, offered this lad a handsome reward if he would undertake their delivery, and return with an answer. The offer was promptly accepted, and four days later the young fellow reappeared at Stevenson with his mission safely accomplished. From that time on for nearly a year "Kent" Wester was regularly employed as a dispatch rider over the Fort Totten trail, and he never failed to get through. The one thing that he steadfastly refused to do was to act as escort or guide to any other person, and thus the secret of his success in avoiding capture or hold-up was never learned.

Of course, Kenton always made a point of stopping at Castle Cave, if only for a few minutes, both going and coming, and between trips, which were made at stated intervals, he spent his time at home busily engaged with the studies that were eventually to fit him for a place in the great outside world.

At length it happened that on a gray day in late November the young trail rider was awaiting at Stevenson the arrival of dispatches from Fort Buford that he was to carry on over the lonely eastward route. Up to that time the season had been open, and the autumn unusually mild; but on this day, in the post trader's store where Kenton waited, it was predicted by the plainsmen there gathered that a decided change was about to take place.

“Winter’s on us,” said one, “and it’s coming in a hurry, too.”

“You bet! and butt-end foremost,” agreed another, “or I don’t know sign. What do you say, young feller?”

“I believe we are in for it,” replied Kenton, “and I only hope it will hold off until I get a good start.”

“You wouldn’t start ef ye knowed a blizzard was coming, would ye?” asked one.

“Yes, I think I would.”

“Then ye’d be a heap bigger fool than I’ve took ye for.”

Just here an orderly appeared with a request that dispatch-rider Wester would step over to the commandant’s office.

A steamboat, the last of the season, had come in from up river a short time before, bringing among other passengers the general in command of that department, who was returning from a tour of inspection. The boat had been tediously delayed by unusually low water, and even worse conditions were reported from below. Chafing under the loss of time already suffered, and anxious to push on with all speed, the general had decided to proceed overland from this point by way of the Fort Totten trail. Already a saddled horse, an escort of a dozen cavalymen, and a four-mule ambulance were drawn up before the office awaiting his pleasure, and all he needed was a guide.

This state of affairs was explained to the young trail rider by the post commandant, while the general sat by and listened.

“And now,” broke in the latter impatiently, “as you are said to be the best trail rider in this section of country, I want you to act as my guide to Fort Totten. We start in five minutes.”

“I am very sorry, sir, but I can't do it,” answered Kenton respectfully.

“What do you mean? You are a Government employee, aren't you?”

“Yes, sir, but——”

“Then you are under my orders, and I order you to guide me to Fort Totten.”

“As I said, sir, I am very sorry, but I can't do it.”

“By heavens! I am not accustomed to being defied in this manner,” cried the general, his face as red as fire. “Major Wainwright, place this fellow under arrest, and lock him up until he can be court-martialed.”

“I beg your pardon, general,” said the commandant, “but perhaps you don't understand that this young man is not enlisted, nor even under a contract. He merely is employed to carry dispatches and is paid by the trip.”

“Then what did you bring him here for? Discharge him at once, and never employ him again. I don't need him, anyhow. I guess I'm enough of a plainsman to find my own way along a clearly defined

trail, without the aid of any impudent young whipper-snapper of a boy. Discharge him at once, sir."

"Mr. Wester, you are discharged and will not again be employed in Government service," said the commandant gravely.

"Very good, sir," replied Kenton, saluting and leaving the office.

His mare, Felicia, a direct descendant of Don Felix, was saddled ready for him, and in another minute, without a word to anyone, he was riding furiously from the post. He was bitterly angry against that general and hoped he would come to grief.

"I wouldn't lift a hand to save the purple-faced old fool," he declared to himself, "and I only hope some of Crow Toe's boys'll get after him. If they don't, the blizzard will, and I expect he'll have had enough of trail riding before he gets through. Major Wainwright ought to have told him that I never act as guide to anybody over this trail. I wouldn't for the President himself, unless the Sioux would let me off from my promise, for that one trip. So I'm discharged, am I? Well, thank goodness! I don't care. I was only riding for the fun and excitement of the thing, anyhow."

As the young rider gained the top of the "breaks," as the bluffs of the upper Missouri are called, he looked back at a cloud of dust that was following fast behind him. "Coming, are you, old purple face?" he cried. "Well, take your last look at your guide, for you won't

see him again. Now, Felicia girl, show 'em your heels. Here we go! Whoopee! for home."

With this the yelling lad disappeared over the crest of the bluffs, and started at racing speed across the wind-swept plain. For it was wind-swept by this time, and the gale, ever gaining strength, was laden with minute particles of icy snow that stung like needles wherever they touched the bare skin.

Never had the plucky little mare shown such speed nor such endurance, and never had they been more needed. Winter had indeed descended upon that bleak northland "butt-end foremost" and with the worst storm of its entire assortment. Fortunately our lad rode down the wind, but even with this advantage, at the end of three hours he was on foot breaking a way through drifts already up to his waist, and leading a trembling animal who seemed about to drop from utter exhaustion with each step. But they already were among the Dog Den buttes, and, with a final strenuous effort, they gained the safety and sheltering warmth of home.

All that night the blizzard raged with unabated fury, but, snugly beyond reach of its utmost efforts, "Kent" Wester thawed out, and ate and drank and told his story. Also he reviled that purple-faced general and declared that unless the latter had turned back without even gaining the crest of the Missouri bluffs, he now was getting what he deserved.

The next morning, with the storm still raging, our lad was amazed to see Mr. Knighton getting into furs as though preparing to go outside.

"What are you going to do, dad?" he asked curiously.

"Going to look for your general," was the quiet reply. "A man of his character isn't apt to turn back when he has set out to accomplish something, and I am afraid that he and his escort may be perishing somewhere in this vicinity."

"Right you are, dad! and I'll go with you," cried the boy, springing to his feet.

"I thought you wouldn't lift a hand to save him."

"I wouldn't last night, but I feel different about it to-day. Poor old chap! I suppose he didn't know any better."

It was a terrible day, and several times the exhausted searchers returned to Castle Cave for rest and refreshment. But always they started out again, with fresh horses, firing rifles and yelling as they struggled forward, and finally, with the short span of daylight merging into arctic night, their efforts were rewarded. They found the general and his men hopelessly huddled in the lee of a butte, without fire, food, or shelter, the ambulance having long since been abandoned, and without their horses, which, left to themselves, had drifted away before the blizzard. The exhausted men were fighting feebly against the ever-piling drifts and trying

to keep them down, but the struggle could not have lasted much longer, and that night would have seen them buried until the suns of another spring should disclose their grave.

“It is like a dream of Paradise,” remarked the general some two hours later, as warmed and comforted and dryly clad he toasted himself before a roaring fire in the living room of Castle Cave. This room was cheery with many candles, and its rocky walls were tapestried with furs. Fur rugs were under foot, while comfortable chairs and divans invited lounging. There were shelves of books, a number of late magazines, pictures and potted ferns. At one side stood a table draped with snowy linen, set for a meal with silver, glass, and china. From a kitchen not far remote came the appetizing odors of cooking, while in and out of the room where the general sat flitted a young girl good to look upon, and gowned as though she were about to preside at a dinner table in St. Louis or any other city where American girls are to be found.

Near the fireplace stood two men, also dressed for dinner according to the conventions of civilization. They were of nearly equal height, but the taller, who also was the elder, wore a silk cap and a beard in which was an occasional thread of silver, while the other was a smooth-faced lad, bronzed, curly headed, and stalwart.

At the expiration of another two hours the general said: “Mr. Knighton, this has been one of the happiest,

as it will ever be the most memorable, evenings of my life. Next to Almighty God I have to thank you and this fine young chap for being permitted to enjoy it. For its actual pleasure I think I am most deeply indebted to your charming daughter. Never have I been talked to more intelligently nor more interestingly, and as I understand that you are thinking of sending her to some Eastern institution of learning, I want to beg you to let her go to S—— College and become a roommate with my daughter, who will enter there next year.”

“What do you say, little daughter?” asked Mr. Knighton.

“Papa, I should love it above everything I can imagine.”

“Then, sir,” replied the fond father, turning to the general, “I suppose it must be as you suggest, for as yet I never have been able to find anything I could deny my blue-eyed girl.”

The storm raged for three days longer, and when it finally ended, “Kent” Wester took his dear friend, General H——, whom he had discovered to be one of the finest of men, to Fort Totten in his five-dog cariole. He was to return the day after their arrival with horses for the soldiers who had been left behind. The general himself came out to see him start, and as he held the lad’s hand in bidding him farewell he asked:

“Kenton, what is your dearest wish in life?”

“To go to West Point, sir,” was the prompt reply.

“So your father intimated, and now I tell you, as I promised him, that your appointment to West Point shall be made out, signed, and forwarded to you before this winter’s snow has left the ground. And, my dear boy, I want you always to remember that, though you will make many friends in your new life, you will never gain one truer or more devoted to your interests than the purple-faced old general whom you pulled out of a snow bank. God bless you! Good-by.”

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THE END

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